# IS Volume3

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These are the novel illustrations that were included in volume 3

Okiura

MF文庫J
ゆ-01-03

IS〈インフィニット・ストラトス〉③
弓弦イズル

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メディアファクトリー
MEDIA FACTORY

## IS〈インフィニット・ストラトス〉③

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そして、ついに篠の専用機・紅椿がその姿を現す。
「私が天才の束さんだよ、はろー」
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そんな中、軍用IS・銀の福音の暴走事故が勃発。一夏をはじめ専用機持ちの面々は事態の収拾へと向かうのだが――
『強さ』を問う、ハイスピード学園バトルラブコメ第三弾！　疾風怒濤の戦闘開始!

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Fセット：ゼロの使い魔 & 聖剣の刀鍛冶

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【著者】

## 弓弦イズル
（ゆみづる・いずる）

今年の夏は大幅に体調を崩しました。
投薬の副作用が原因…なのかも。
気をつけないといけませんね。

おかげさまで第三巻です。
表紙の鈴がとても可愛くて
okiura先生ブラボー。オー、ブラボー。

ときに自画像は妻が描いてくれました。
……はっ!?　「自画」じゃない!

【イラストレーター】

## okiura

新進気鋭のイラストレーター。普段は擬人化メカ少女や魔法少女ものを好んでよく描く。
『白銀のローレシアン』（一迅社文庫）の挿絵を担当。また、マクロスA（エース）にて「ノシ」名義で「マクロスF～しーくれっとびじょんず～」を連載中。

カバーイラスト／okiura　装丁／伸童舎

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J
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MF文庫J 弓弦イズルの本

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- IS〈インフィニット・ストラトス〉② [イラスト：okiura]
- IS〈インフィニット・ストラトス〉③ [イラスト：okiura]

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# InfiniteStratos 3

Izuru Yumizuru

太陽と水着、
夏のまぶしさが待っていた。

「やれる！この紅椿なら！」

「……」

（い、いかん、これはかなり気恥ずかしい……）

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# キャラクター紹介

## 織斑一夏（おりむらいちか）

「世界で唯一ISを動かせる男子」。
専用IS【白式】。

## 篠ノ之箒（しののほうき）

一夏の幼なじみ。
専用ISなし。

## セシリア・オルコット

イギリス代表候補生。
専用IS【ブルー・ティアーズ】。

## 凰鈴音（ファン・リンイン）

中国代表候補生。
専用IS【甲龍】。

## シャルロット・デュノア

フランス代表候補生。
専用IS【R-リヴァイヴ・カスタムII】。

## ラウラ・ボーデヴィッヒ

ドイツ代表候補生。
専用IS【シュヴァルツェア・レーゲン】。

口絵・本文イラスト●okiura

# CHOCO

3
インフィニット・ストラトス
INFINITE STRATOS
弓弦イズル
YUMIZURU Izuru
Illustration: CHOCO
OVERLAP

# IS 3

INFINITE STRATOS

インフィニット・ストラトス 3

弓弦イズル
YUMIZURU Izuru

Illustration: CHOCO

さあ、行かん。いざ海へ！

箒「見えたぞ、一夏！」
一夏「!!」
箒「加速するぞ！目標に接触するのは
十秒後だ。一夏、集中しろ！」
一夏「ああ！」

日本の量産型ISであり、シェアは世界第二位。火力に難があり、単機での運用は向かないが、第二世代型ISの中では最高の防御能力を持ち、『シールドが破壊される前に修復する』ことで継戦能力を上げ、支援機として非常に高い能力を持つ。扱いやすさ、整備のしやすさから、各国で訓練機及び新武装試験機として未だに多くの機体が稼働している。
なお、IS学園の訓練機では他機を抜いてもっとも多く配備されている。

日本の武者鎧に習った各装甲を束ねる特殊繊維の帯は機体にかかる様々な応力を吸収し、装甲の特性と相まって防御力の底上げをしている。肩部の物理シールドと強固なアーマースカートとを合わせて様々な局面で味方機の強力な盾となる。

搭載された日本製の柔軟なOSは汎用性が非常に高く、全ISの中で最も『換装装備』が多い。特に超長距離射撃用パッケージ「撃鉄」は現在でも超長距離射撃命中率の世界記録を保持している。

和名：打鉄
型式：強化外装・六一式
世代：第二世代
国家：日本

分類：近接両用型
装備：近接ブレード『葵』
　　アサルトライフル『焔備』
装甲：耐貫通性スライド・レイヤー装甲
仕様：防御シールド高速修復

篠ノ之 束が制作した第四世代相当のIS。
全身を朱漆の様な深い紅で包み、金の蒔絵で手脚を飾ったまさに“絢爛”な特別機。

背面にある花弁のような一対の大型バインダー、腕部、脚部の各ユニットは展開装甲と呼ばれる可動式の装甲を纏っており、展開すると全体のシルエットを変えるほどの“変身”をする。

展開装甲とはアクティブ・エネルギー・プラスターであり、用途に応じて攻撃や防御に使えるほか、推進力としても使用可能である。最大展開では全身からエネルギー・ブレードを発生させることも可能で、出力調整によってはそれ自体を射撃兵器として扱うこともできる。

和名：紅椿
型式：XX-02
世代：第四世代
国家：日本

分類：全状況対応万能型
装備：射撃性近接ブレード『空裂』『雨月』
装甲：流動量子組成装甲
仕様：展開装甲（完成型）
　　エネルギー倍加能力『絢爛舞踏』

Charlotte DUNOIS Right

III

Left Laura BODEWIG

## 織斑一夏 おりむら・いちか

Ichika ORIMURA

世界で唯一ISを動かせる男子。
専用IS【白式】

## 篠ノ之箒 しののの・ほうき

Houki SHINONONO

一夏の幼なじみ。
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Cecilia ALCOTT

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専用IS【ブルー・ティアーズ】

## 凰鈴音 ファン・リンイン

Lingyin HUANG

**中国代表候補生**
**専用IS【甲龍】**

## シャルロット・デュノア

Charlotte DUNOIS

**フランス代表候補生**
**専用IS【ラファール・リヴァイヴ・カスタムII】**

## ラウラ・ボーデヴィッヒ

Laura BODEWIG

**ドイツ代表候補生**
**専用IS【シュヴァルツェア・レーゲン】**

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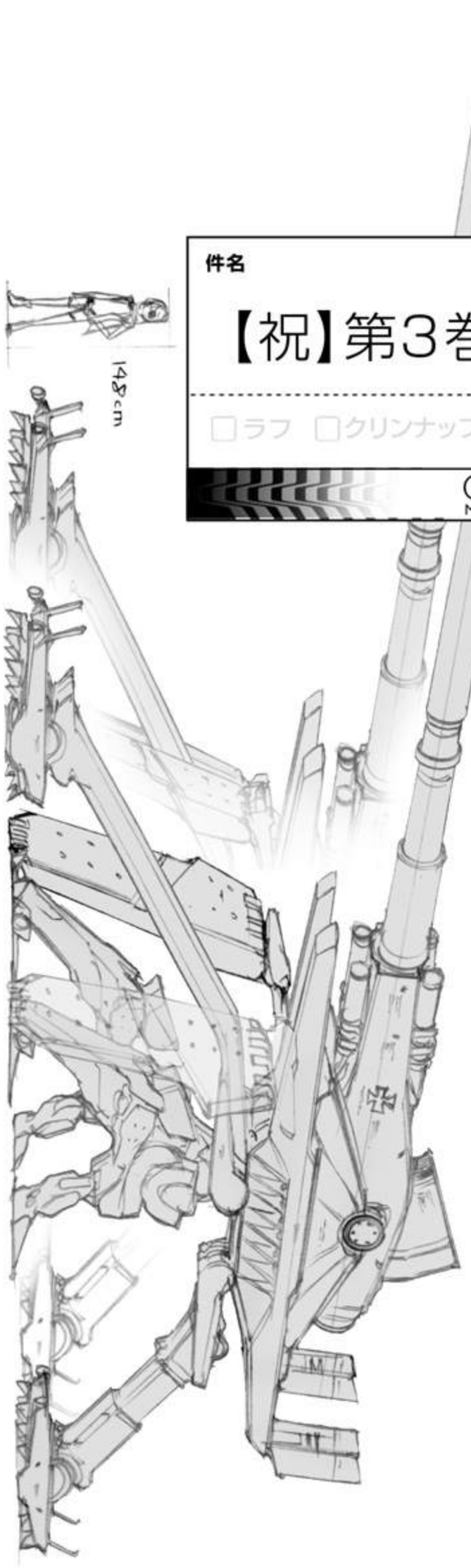


件名

# 【祝】第3巻発売！

□ラフ □クリンナップ ■あとがき

日付

：2013/
4月だけど気温は冬。

時刻

：今頃お城の舞踏会では
アニメの発表が…

CHOCO
MUGITANI KOICHI

http://chocolateshop-float.com

池袋のお城では今頃華やかなパーティが開かれて、キレイな声優さん達と弓弦先生がきゃっきゃうふふとISアニメ第2期の発表で盛り上がっているのね…

でも私負けない！
原稿を早く上げなかった私が悪いの。
あ、あなたは魔法使いのお婆さん！
それは何？
アニメ2期の声優さんリスト？！
え！なんてこと…ステキ！

そしてこのカボチャに魔法をかければ…
えい！
ぽわわわ〜ん
ああ、カボチャがデザインしたけど挿絵で描けなかった120mmL80レールガン二門装備のシュヴァルツェア・レーゲン　パンツァー・カノニーアになったわ！

ありがとうお婆さん！

CHOCO

# Chapter 1 Rain Maker - The Heart of a Young Girl is the Fog of a Clear Day

"Sorry for making you help me."

"Don't worry."

Under the red sunset, Ichika and Charlotte were walking together through the corridor. Both of them were carrying the itinerary information for the seaside school that was to be held this month.

"But...is this really alright? You're supposed to go with Cecilia and the rest, right?"

"It's alright. It's pointless for me to go if Charlotte's not going."

"Huh?"

"Well, how should I say this. Even if it's just giving out pamphlets, I still prefer to be with the ones I like."

Saying that, Ichika's face blushed somewhat. That didn't seem to look like the color of the sunset.

"Ichika..."

"Charlotte..."

On the corridor where they were standing on, both of them were looking at each other in the eyes.

At this point, silence is golden.

In this orange scene, the two shadows overlap--

"--That's, weird?"

She looked around to confirm. She had spaced out.

She was in her own first-year dorm room in IS Academy. It was 6.30am in the morning.

"..."

While she was still a little drowsy, Charlotte blinked twice, and finally grasped the current situation.

"It was a dream..."

Siiggghhh....she sighed deeply, so deep that it reached 20,000 feet below sea level.

(Ahh, at least let me dream on for another 10 seconds... )

She continued to cling onto to remnants of her dream, obviously looking unwilling to give it up.

Even the dream sequence that would be quickly forgotten continued to linger as she continued to hang onto it. The image that was left in her mind was like a video record she loved to watch, as the 'play' button seemed to be pressed in her mind.

"..."

Charlotte's face blushed.

As her consciousness started to clear, she began to feel embarrassed about the dream.

(We actually...in the sch-school corridor...)

However, as the words indicated, that was just a dream. She placed her hands on her chest, and found her heart beating wildly.

(Wha-What was I thinking...)

Ever since the individual division tournament last month, she went from Charles Dunois to her actual gender of Charlotte Dunois. Right now, she was sleeping in a separate room from Ichika.

But every week, she would dream of such a thing twice a week. She knew that they're in different rooms, but she would turn her eyes to look at the bed beside her for Ichika.

"That's strange?"

Her roommate wasn't in the bed.

And that didn't mean that she left the bed and went off . That bed wasn't used.

"...Well, never mind."

Right now, the most important thing to her is to continue to dream. If she were to sleep again, maybe she might dream of the continuation.

Carrying such casual thoughts, Charlotte closes her eyes, intending to sleep again.

(Since it's rare to have a dream, I won't mind having some erotic content in it--)

...

"Wha-What am I saying!!"

Charlotte covered the top of her head with the blanket, as if trying to hide her rapidly blushing face, and finally calmed her crazily beating heart down.

*Chirp chirp...*

"Mn..."

The sun that frantically tried to enter the room passed through the window, and the chirping of the sparrows seemed like they were prompting me to get up.

(A little longer...just a little longer...)

At this moment, staying in bed is the most wonderful feeling. I suppose everyone knows how to enjoy this peaceful feeling, right? Well, that should be the case.

It's soft.

(...?)

Soft and squishy.

(Huh? What's this feeling? Do I have something smooth in my bed?)

However, right now, I can't get myself to give up on this comfort and laziness to stay in bed and search for the unknown.

(Ahh--how wonderful...)

Soft and loose.

"Mn..."

--HOLD ON A MINUTE! I just heard a voice that doesn't belong to me. And that's most likely not a guy's voice. (Speaking of which, it would be really terrifying if it's a guy.)

A premonition passes my mind, letting out a *GONG* like sound effect.

*POW!* I flip the blanket off, and what appears in front of me is--

"La-LA-LAURA!!?"

The German representative, Laura Bodewig. Ever since she transferred in last month, she suddenly challenged me, and after that, a lot of things happened--lots of them.

However, that's not the problem. The problem is 'why is she not wearing any clothes?'; which means, well... she's completely naked. She has only a left eyepatch and an IS on standby--the black leg band on her right thigh. The flowing silver hair is scattered down her waist.

"Mn...what...? It's already morning...?"

"IDIOT, IDIOT!! HIDE THEM!!:

"You're saying such weird things. I heard that spouses don't hide things from each other."

"Maybe you're right...NO! HURRY UP AND PUT SOME CLOTHES ON! WEAR SOME CLOTHES!!"

Ignoring my chaos, Laura just rubbed her eyes once and immediately reverted back to her usual expression...

amazing, she can actually get out of bed easily. Such a terrifying person.

--No, now's not the time to think about this! Just when I was busy thinking about it, Laura said,

"I heard that this manner of waking people up is very common, isn't it? It's said that engaged couples do this."

"...Who's the bastard who gave you such false information?"

"But it seems to be have an instant effect..."

"?"

"Are you awake?"

"Damn right..."

Anyone who's still not awake after seeing this either has a damaged brain or a rotten body, right? Either way, their specialty is that they're dead, devoid of response and just like an ordinary corpse. But to a bystander, only a psychologically abnormal person would talk to the dead, right? The dead need a grave, and that guy needs a doctor or something.

"But there's still some time 'til breakfast."

Laura's covered with the blanket, and the hair that was bundled behind at one point is scattered. I'm unhappy about it, but that shiny silver hair that's basking under the morning sun is really beautiful.

(Even so, this gal here has been doing this kind of stuff ever since the tournament last month. It's really troublesome...)

She basically treated eating food at the same table as something to be expected. Once, she appeared when I was showering, and even before that, she was below me in an IS suit...no way! If I leave her like this, she would be even more incorrigible.

"..."

Uu--is there a way to make her less enthusiastic?

"What's wrong...ah, stop staring at me like that! I'll get really embarrassed."

I have a liar in front of me. But the way this liar looked embarrassed is a little...no, extremely cute.

(Ugh, ah...NO! NO, NO, NO!!)

--Oh, I got a great idea!

"Laura."

"What?"

"I like dignified and elegant girls, you know."

"Oh--"

Seemingly surprised, Laura widened her eyes slightly, and then nods her head twice, seemingly processing what I meant.

Ohh, things are proceeding smoothly! I'm glad. Here's a reward! Haha, thanks for your reward. I'm the Master and the Servant is Me[3A 1].

"But that's just what you like, right?"

"Huh?"

"I'm me."

Those eyes filled with determination are staring at me.

The hand that's seemingly pointing at where the heart is draws what looks like a heart.

"..."

...Whaa--

What's with this organism that's full of belief? I'd likely sleep with her if I'm a girl, I guess? Sorry, I was just spouting nonsense.

"Bas-Basically, didn't you say that..."

Huh? What did I say? Damn it, I can't remember?

"You told me to do anything as I wish, but now...that's too despicable..."

Uu, I seem to have said that before, but what should I say...being liked to such an extent. I should be troubled or something like that...

Speaking of which, she went from a brazen attitude to looking up at me and talking to me now. It looks abnormally charming. This is what she's talking about,

right? Besides, it nearly caused her to blush or her heart to start pounding like crazy...well, I don't really know anyway.

Once this thought developed, even the hand that she placed in front of her chest so openly now looked like it's blocking my sight. Unbelievable.

"Yo-You're telling me to cover them, but you seem to be enjoying it, isn't it?"

"WHAT....? I-IDIOT! I'M NOT! I'M NOT!!!"

"The-Then, do you want to look? You've been really daring ever since morning started..."

"WAAH!! WAIT A SECOND!!"

Seeing Laura flip the blanket off, I panicked. Though I intend to make her cover it up, I got easily passed, causing me to end up in a wrestling match.

It's now 6 plus in the morning...to the residents in the rooms besides me, above and below, I'm really sorry.

"You...!"

I tried to grab a corner of the blanket to suppress Laura ...or so I intended. But she used my momentum that was going above to sweep me down. It's over, this is a military combat skill. I can't possibly win.

And thus, having been flipped over, my head landed directly on the floor in an embarrassing manner, and my neck got twisted by 90 degrees. IT HURTS!!!

"You should do some more wrestling techniques."

Huh...Laura's tone is just like Chifuyu-nee. As expected of her ex-student, even the icy cold stare's the same.

"Bu-But, about that...if you want to do sle-sleeping technique training, it's not that I can't join in..."

Why is she blushing? Basically, the sleeping technique she's mentioning is--AH!

"I-IDIOT! GIRLS SHOULDN'T BE SAYING SUCH THINGS!!"

"Oh? You want to say it yourself? I-I'm fine with it..."

"NO WAY! SPEAKING OF WHICH, YOU DID SUCH A THING TO ME, AND YOU NEVER REFLECTED ON IT!!"

"What thing?"

"Wha, huh, that, that..."

Huh--ah--uu--

"A...a kiss..."

Uu...remembering this, I didn't just blush, my body went hot on it's heart. However, I don't want to remember the hellish sight from that time, so I have to stop here. Anyway, my lips got taken by Laura last month, and also--

"Th-That was my first time..."

Though I feel inferior for saying this, this is still a fact. That was my first kiss. As it was too much of an impact, who would notice the taste? Those people who said that a first kiss has a taste of lemon, stand right up!

"I see."

"What do you mean by 'I see'..."

The irritating response made me rage, but before I went berserk, Laura continues,

"I-I'm the same as well...first time! Mnn...I'm really happy..."

Because she blushed as she said that, I had nothing to say at all. Please think carefully. When the girl in front of you is blushing and extremely cute (outstandingly cute), who can complain? Any guy who can complain isn't a guy at all, or at least that's what I think. I guess.

"..."

"..."

Huuh, what's with this silent presence? More than awkward, it feels more like we feel more aware of each other's presence.

No wait, let's change the atmosphere.

"WAAH!!"

Intending to stand up, I got forced back by Laura back onto the bed. That's a splendid yet quick skill, making me suspect 'where did she get such tremendous strength on those slender arms?'.

"You, you're really troublesome. I really want to ask you, why are you so capable of inflaming other people's feelings?"

Wh-Wha-What's she saying!? I don't understand at all! But right now, time is essential. Laura's blushing as she's covered by the morning sun, slowly pressing down on me.

Behind the dormitory, in an empty space that's occasionally used as a simple gathering place, Houki would come here to train seriously almost every day.

"Hoo..."

Having finished her morning shadow swing practice, Houki pulled out her towel from her bag of belongings.

The beads of sweat that were lit by the morning sun shone like precious stones.

The white torso guard (do) and the navy blue skirt ( hakama) covered her healthy skin. Houki actually wore tabi socks and straw shoes (zori). To put it seriously, footwork has a very important significance in kendo. The tabi[3A 2] and zori[3A 3] that can allow the practitioner to step forward, defend and conserve energy are the ' imaginary battle practical equipment'.

In kendo tournaments, the practitioners are required to be barefooted. And the tabi and zori combination can give a barefoot-like touch.

But either way, Houki seemingly never went to the kendo club before. Even so, she continued to practice in order to not waste her skills.

(But it's already July...)

Recently, the morning sun began to rise earlier. Besides that, she began to feel that the gradually rising hot air was mixing in the atmosphere. Though exercising did improve her mood, she wouldn't feel good after being all sweaty and sorts.

(Let's go take a shower then.)

*If that's the case, my roommate should be sleeping, right?* Though they're rather distant, she would feel bad waking her roommate up, thus Houki walked towards the club tower bathroom.

(July--it's July already, Ichika, you haven't forgotten about it, have you?)

At this point, the first month of summer is extremely special to Houki.

"Oh my, you woke up early as well. Good morning."

"Good morning, sensei."

The teacher who's in charge of the club tower still opened the facility at this time today for the students who were practicing in the morning.

Sakakibara-sensei, who was about to be 29 today, is gentle to students, has great morals, and has good looks, but her luck with men is abysmal. Anyway, the guys she likes every time are the ones where other females would think 'no, I think he's a little...', guys who aren't going to

have positive impressions. Many times during the year, she would be dumped badly and would go drink alone.

But this is the last year where she's going to be 20+. Her parents have been trying to matchmake for her, which is her present trouble recently. Unable to refuse, Sakakibara-sensei went dating with a few people, but she kept having the same thoughts.

"He's good. But I just can't fan my passion..."

Yes, that's right. She doesn't want peace nor stability. That's why she keeps falling for strange guys. She feels it herself too. If the target she meets can't fan her passion, nothing he says can change her mind. She doesn't want to end a marriage just because she's tired of it--that's Sakakibara Natsuki's introduction.

"I'm here to borrow the bathroom."

"Okay, take your time. Make sure that the faucet's turned off properly once you're done."

"Okay."

Hearing Houki's clear answer, Sakakibara-sensei smiles as she nods her head--she's a beauty, but as for her luck with guys, just read the above.

(Then...)

She walked into the changing room. There was no one here other than Houki, and it was to be expected given the time. Before the students end their morning exercise and run in, she could probably dilly-dally for another 30 minutes.

In fact, Houki came here earlier because she didn't want to meet the students who were training.

And the reason why she did this is--

"..."

As the 'do' was taken away, the breasts that were held down underneath bounced out.

The breasts that were way too developed for a girl her age would attract looks from people of the opposite gender *and* of the same gender.

Once, she was changing with the girls who were doing morning exercise, and all of them stared dumbstruck at her breasts. As Houki walked towards the bathroom, the girls started following her like she was the piper who led the girls away[3A 4]. After that, though everyone went into their own bath cubicles, she couldn't calm down with all the stares around her.

And that time, something worse happened. After someone mentioned the word 'watermelons...', everyone started playing a charades game with round-shaped fruits like they were hypnotized.

Embarrassed and angry and blushing red, Houki escaped the bathroom that time.

(Uu, seems like they've gotten bigger...)

Huge breasts aren't as good as what people say, at least that's what the person who has them will say.

First, the shoulders would ache. They shake every time she made a large movement. She also found them bothersome. There seemed to be few matching bra sizes for her, and because of that, the number of clothes she could wear were few. And no matter how she wore them , the clothes seemed to emphasize the bustline, attracting looks from both genders.

(Can't I deal with this problem...)

Haaa...she sighed. On a side note, if she were to say that trouble to Rin accidentally, she would face a situation even worse than being pursued and hunted by her till the end of the world. It's that terrifying. A woman's pride is higher than the Everest, deeper than the Mariana Trench and even more delicate than the sweets from that famous Kyoto Ogiya. It's also classified as the first kind of dangerous items, level 1 'highly explosive and dangerous', to be handled with respect and cautiously.

(B-But, that...if Ichika likes girls with large breasts, it would be a different thing altogether...)

She remembered that when she argued against Cecilia last month, she couldn't help but grab Ichika's arm.

To Houki, that was an unbelievably daring thing to do for her normally, but seeing that Ichika realized that she's of the opposite gender, it made her even happier than she imagined.

Truth be told, even though she wanted to go against Cecilia, just having Ichika's arm touch her breasts made her self-aware and embarrassed at the same time. However--

(If that can make Ichika be aware of me...)

Anyway, that's good as well. No matter how much kendo training she puts in, she's still a girl in her youth, so it's unavoidable that she would like someone.

And there's also the seaside school this month. In terms of timing, there's nothing better than this activity.

Of course, the main aim of the seaside school is to have IS equipment mobilization in the open unlimited space, but this is IS Academy, where 99% of them are girls, so naturally they would consider the girls' feelings. The first

day would be free and easy--in other words, everyone can swim or play, and the school did think of the students feelings by not limiting them to just school swimsuits. It's all free and easy.

(This is a rare chance...!)

There will be an intense battle to get the only guy, Ichika. Though this is to be expected. Houki has her own plan.

"Okay! I'll get him to buy something with me this weekend!"

Unknowingly, as Houki clenched her fist, her voice echoed throughout the bathroom that has only her in it.

(...Okay.)

Having used the shower to wash away her sweat and blow her hair dry, her clean summer clothes were already put on herself.

Then, she checked her hair thrice, cleared her throat five times to adjust her voice. After doing all that, Houki finally knocked on Ichika's room door.

*Knock* *knock*.

"I-Ichika, are you in there? It's a rare chance, so how about we go out for breakfast?"

Silence, no response.

"Ichika? Are you still sleeping? You'll miss breakfast if you don't wake up."

But even after saying that a second time, she didn't get a response.

Somewhat unhappy, Houki placed her hand on the door handle.

*Clack*.

(Hm? The door isn't locked...that guy's really careless. Really!)

"I'm going in, Ichika. Hurry up and get ready--"

"Ge..."

"Mu?"

*BISSH!!* Houki's expression, movements and her entire body froze.

As she pushed the door open and walked in, she saw a thoroughly naked Laura pressing on Ichika's body, getting ready to kiss him. For some reason, Ichika didn't look like he was making any resistance.

Understanding till this part, Houki finally lost it.

"ICHIKA! WH-WHA-WHAT ARE YOU DOING, YOU WEAK BASTARD!!"

*SWOOSH!* She drew out a real sword at one go. That was the result of training everyday, but to Ichika, who's being pointed at, this isn't a joke.

"What? Hold it, Houki! That's a misunderstanding!!"

"WHAT MISUNDERSTANDING!? HOW DID I MISUNDERSTAND! HUMPH, JUST LET ME SLICE YOU UP!!"

"AHH!! STOP IT, I'M TELLING YOU TO STOP, YOU IDIOT!!"

"YOU'RE AN IDIOT! YOU BIG MORON!!"

Being unreasonable, Houki raised the blade above her head, getting into a position where she's about to slice my head in half. Unquestionably, that blade that's reflecting pure light is as serious as ever. I can tell that I won't just be injured if I get hit.

"YOU-YOU-YOU BETTER ACCEPT PUNISHMENT NOW!!"

*SWOOSH!* As the sound of the blade dancing through the wind could be heard, Ichika felt his sweat foreboding his imminent death.

--But that blade stopped at the last second. More accurately, it got blocked.

"It'll trouble me if you end up killing my bride."

"Cheh, you..."

Laura's right arm deployed the IS. It seems like she put the AIC on that part to block Houki's blade.

Being held down by that invisible force, Houki was unable to move, making her even more impatient.

On a side note, Laura's bride = Ichika. Though it should be the groom, but it's unknown where Laura heard that 'in Japan, everyone would treat the people they love as 'their bride'[3A 5]. So the conclusion became Ichika = Laura's bride. *One day, just one day, I have to choke that person who taught her this extremely wrong piece of information*--Ichika swore deep inside.

"Hoo, I'm saved...hm? Laura, you took off your eyepatch?"

Noticing the shiny gold left eye Laura's showing, Ichika's shocked. Once, due to a certain event, this eye changed color. It contained Laura's self-loathing past, thus she fought with her sealed left eye, but lost.

That's because that left eye had nanomachines that were used to complement the IS's extremely potent sensors. It enhances her sights, and even if the IS is in standby mode, she can see objects more than 2km away.

"I really hated this eye in the past, but not anymore."

"Oh, really? That's great."

Ichika added on with a 'no point hating your own body...' as he nodded his head. Seeing him like this, Laura blushed again.

"Be-Because you said that it's pretty..."

Seeing Laura turn away in an embarrassed manner, Ichika's heart raced for some reason. But Houki didn't feel interested.

"Che..."

"Che?"

"CHIESTOOOOOO---!!"

Roaring, Houki broke through Laura's AIC with brute force and swings down.

"WAHHH!!"

*ZUDOMU!* The blanket and bed got sliced down in half. She had such talent wielding a sword at 15 years of age. Any swordmaster who's around would definitely recruit her into his clan.

"ICHIKA!! DIE!!!"

"YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT!!"

"How rude of you, putting moves on other people's brides."

3 people, 3 different reactions. The standoff continued as they trudged on line by line. The morning commotion proceeded until the dorm caretaker Yamada-sensei frantically came running in.

"..."

After a while, the location changed. This is the first year student cafeteria. Having been released from the hellish calamity just now, I'm eating a slightly late breakfast.

On a side note, Laura's sitting beside me, and Houki's sitting opposite me.

I ordered a natto and grilled fish set, Laura chose bread, corn soup and chicken salad. As for Houki, she chose-

"Hm? Do you want to eat it?"

Having noticed my stare, Laura added 'I'll share some with you' and used her mouth to pick the bread up. Hm? Why must you use your mouth to pick up the bread... sigh, WAH!!

"Hm...what's wrong? You can bite it, you know?"

"ID-IDIOT! WHO CAN EAT LIKE THIS! THIS IS JUST LIKE KISS--"

The moment I said 'up till there', Houki forcefully slammed onto the table.

"Can you please be more quiet when eating...?"

Her lips are twitching, giving a terrifying smile.

"Fuu... are you jealous?"

"What?"

"You're envious because you couldn't do it?"

"Wh-Who, who can't do it! I-Ichika!!"

After drinking a large gulp of miso soup, Houki reaches out. Don't tell me this is...no, whatever the taste is, isn't she going to feed me with her mouth? Huh, when can I eat breakfast?

"...!...!"

The meaning of this is to prompt me to drink. So this is the meaning of talking with your eyes. It's referring to this. It'll be good if those eyes can be less like some highly-skilled sniper.

"Let me tell you something. Ichika said this himself."

Laura, who stuffed a large amount of chicken salad into her mouth, swallowed it before saying.

"Ichika likes elegant and dignified girls, you know."

"!"

Facing Laura who said that without any care, Houki revealed a mystified look.

Then, she swallows the miso soup in her mouth and then sits down. After that, she keeps a serene expression on her face as she eats her breakfast. Maybe she's mindful of the 'elegant and dignified' part, I guess? The amount of food she picked up is a lot less than usual.

(But, Houki's really a beauty when she can remain serene like this...)

Due to her daily training, her back's normally straight, and she doesn't have any additional fat on her arms and legs. The fingers that are holding the chopsticks are exceptionally pretty and her skillful use of the chopsticks has the elegance of a pianist.

"WAAHH!! I-I'M LATE...I'M ALMOST LATE...!"

Suddenly, a rare voice range.

The person who spoke hurriedly rushed into the cafeteria and picked one of the remaining sets that's closest to her.

"Yo, Charlotte."

"Ah, Ichika, good-good morning."

As there happened to be a seat beside me, I waved my hand to call her here.

It's rare for Charlotte to come to the cafeteria at such a late timing, and it's easy to tell from her hurried expression. It's true that in this situation when she just got ready to eat breakfast, she'll be late if she doesn't finish it up quickly.

"What's wrong? Charlotte? You would be punctual most of the time. Did you oversleep?"

"Y-Yeah, a bit...well, too much..."

"Oh, so Charlotte also oversleeps."

"Uu, well, yeah, oo...that's because...I went back to sleep..."

Maybe it's because she's eating? Charlotte seemed to be mumbling. Also, I don't know if it's just me, but she seemed to be delicately keeping her distance from me...?

"Charlotte..."

"Uu, hm?"

"You seem to be avoiding me."

"No, no, such thing!! Mn, not at all!!"

Though she said that, it seems that she's wary of me.

Besides, she was my roommate who stayed with me for about a month, so I can more or less tell that Charlotte's hiding something.

(But it will be irritating if I press on. Never mind. Speaking of which--)

Unknowingly, I start to look away from Charlotte who was hurriedly eating her breakfast.

On a side note, after my one on one training with her, she became rather skilled with chopsticks. Right now, for her to remove the bones of a grilled fish is as easy as washing her face before breakfast...we're eating breakfast , and I just mentioned about before breakfast[3A 6].

"I-Ichika? You're staring at me, you know? Is-Is my hair messy due to sleep?"

"No, that's not it. It's because you've been wearing guys clothes the past month that I felt it's refreshing to see Charlotte in girl's clothing."

"Re-Refreshing?"

"Hn. I feel that you're cute."

Maybe she's not used to being praised, I guess, as Charlotte immediately blushed on hearing my words.

"...Though you say-say that, you told me to wear guys clothing in the dream..."

"Hm? Dream?"

"NO-NOTHING! NOTHING AT ALL!!"

Charlotte forcefully shakes her head and waves her hands to deny it before retracting her hands to continue eating her breakfast.

And because I'd finished eating breakfast, I intended to drink some tea. However--

"OWW!!"

There was a shoe stomped on my feet, and my face got pinched.

"Saying to others that you like elegant and dignified girls, yet you're pretty frivolous, aren't you?"

"You're my bride. You should praise me more."

On a side note, Houki and Laura said these as they did those things respectively. Huh? Where did this hell come from? Do I have to keep pressing the 'B' button to escape[3A 7]? Spare me the deep-fried punishment[3A 8].

"Huh..."

Hurry up and think of somethin--okay, got a good idea!

"You're both beauties if both of you calm down."

*DONK!!*

MY FEET GOT STAMPED BY BOTH PEOPLE!! IT HURRTTSS!!

""STOP COMPARING US TOGETHER!!""

Uwahh, really terrifying...both of them are glaring at me really fiercely. What's wrong? You two hate to be mentioned together? Get along together more, you two. Really...

*DING--DONG--DANG--DONG*.

See, even the prep bell rung because both of you don't get along well with each other--hm? The prep bell?

"UWAHH! IT-IT'S THE BELL! WE HAVE TO GO GET READY FOR CLASS. HURRY UP!!"

Huh, that's weird?

Frantically getting up from the table, I was the only one left. Houki, Laura and Charlotte have already left the table and ran off...uwahh! Wait for me, you people!

"DON'T, DON'T LEAVE ME BEHIND! I REMEMBER IT'S CHIFUYU-NEE'S--NO, ORIMURA-SENSEI'S SHR[3A 9]!!"

It's practically suicide to be late.

"I don't want to die."

"Me neither."

"Sorry, Ichika."

UWWAHHH, THESE PEOPLE ARE TOO MUCH!! EVERYONE SHOULD DIE TOGETHER RIGHT!?

--On a side note, if I were in their shoes, I would've answered the same. Besides, the number of martyrs and salt content should be reduced to the lowest.

Just when I was thinking about this, we arrived at the main door. We had to change to outdoor shoes when we leave the dormitory, and we had to change back to indoor shoes once we reach back to the school building, so it was really troublesome...ugh, the three girls have already disappeared.

"Hurry up, Ichika!"

OOHH! My hand got grabbed immediately after I put on my indoor shoes on. I thought who it was. Charlotte seemed to have been waiting for me. Such a great person. Are you willing to die with me?

"I'm flying off, Ichika!"

"Huh?"

Just when I was about to ask, Charlotte's deployed parts on her legs and back, assimilated them and flew off.

This was a partial deployment of Charlotte's personal IS, the 'Raphael Revive Custom II', which was basically materializing the parts on the legs, to allow thrust, and on the back, to allow flight.

"--OWAAHH!!"

My body got dragged up suddenly. I couldn't even see anyone on the corridors when the official bell that indicates the start of lesson rings. With the IS' flight capability, Charlotte and I got up to the 3rd level in a jiffy ...but, about that, what should I say...I think it's best that you don't fly with a mini-skirt, because, well...I just saw her light blue panties.

"We're here!"

"Oh? It's been tough on you."

...That's strange? The official bell hasn't rung yet, and yet the demonic teacher is already in the classroom.

The homeroom teacher of class 1-1, Orimura Chifuyu, my own older sister and the ex-representative of Japan in the IS global tournament. She's also winner of the overall and close ranged categories in the first tournament, and she's a teacher who's still as strong as an Oni even without any equipment.

I glanced at Charlotte's face, and this is the first time I saw her face turn blue like that.

"This school is established as an institute to develop IS pilots, so this place isn't affiliated to any other country or is it affected by external powers...however--"

*BAM!!* The attack of the attendance book sounded as loud as ever.

"You are not allowed to deploy IS without official permission, even if you're in school. Do you understand me?"

"Ye-Yes...I'm sorry..."

To think that the honor student Charlotte would actually do something that would break the rules. This seems to have left quite the impression on the other classmates as everyone just remained dumbstruck.

On a side note, Houki and Laura used the time when Charlotte and I got lectured and sneaked in through the back of the classroom, getting into their own seats. Huh... I guess it's to be expected, but they don't intend to help me.

"Dunois and Orimura, after school, stay behind to clean the classroom. If there's a second time, I'll make you two write a letter of reflection and live in the special classroom, am I clear?"

""Yes...""

Both of us got to our seats with dejected moods. Being scolded by the devil, tough luck.

*DING* *DONG* *DANG* *DONG*. Ignoring the occasion, the bell rung, and SHR started.

"We'll be having an ordinary lesson today. Though all of you are IS Academy students, you are all still High School students. Don't fail!"

That's right. Though there's less lesson time, we have to learn ordinary subjects. These subjects aren't tested in mid-term, but they are tested at the end of the term. If I

fail, I have to spend the entire summer vacation in remedials, and that's the only outcome I want to avoid at all costs.

"Also, from next week onwards, it will be the special school trip practical lesson time. Everyone is reminded not to forget your items. We will be leaving school for 3 days, so remember not to play too much during your free time."

That's right, the special school trip practical lesson time in early July--the seaside school will last 3 days. The first day is basically free and easy. Of course, because we're going to the seaside, these girls in their youth of teenage years were already excited since last week.

On a side note, I find that buying trunks is too much of a hassle. But when I mentioned that honestly, Cecilia and Rin warned me like a machine gun, so I have to buy a pair. Well, I'll go take a look during the weekend.

But I haven't swum in the sea for a long time. Actually, I'm really looking forward to it.

"Then, that'll be the end of SHR. Everyone's to study seriously today."

"Excuse me, Orimura-sensei. Is Yamada-sensei on leave?"

The good student in class, Tagatsuki Shizune-san raised an obvious question. To be honest, I'm mindful as well, but she either overslept or got bothered by something else, right?

"Yamada-sensei went ahead to check the place for our field trip, so she won't be here today. Thus, I'm taking over Yamada-sensei's duties for today."

"Huuh, Yama-chan went to the seaside already? That's so cool~!"

"That's sneaky! She should have brought me along!"

"Ah--is she swimming? She must be swimming--!"

As expected of the girls in their teenage years. Once there's something, they can make a ruckus out of it. Chifuyu-nee found it irritating since she continued on.

"Ahh, stop making a big commotion out of everything, it's irritating! Yamada-sensei went to work, not to play!"

*Yes*-- the girls in class answered in unison. Such amazing teamwork[3A 10].

After school, in the classroom that's dyed sunset, Charlotte and I are cleaning the classroom. There're no other students here, or rather, in this IS Academy, they wouldn't call on the students to clean the floor. The assigned cleaners will clean the classrooms, corridors and even the ceiling are cleaned neatly.

The reason they don't allow students to clean the classroom seem to be because in the past, the caretakers of the students voiced an objection, saying that 'even if it's just a little time, they should focus on IS education' and made the rule.

Thus, cleaning the classroom became a light punishment for students, and we're experiencing this now. But--

"Mn--it's interesting."

"Huh?"

"Nothing. I'm just saying that it's interesting to clean, especially when it's the classroom we use so often."

"Is-Is that so? You're so weird, Ichika..."

Huh? How did it end up like this? I thought Charlotte would agree with me. I'm a little hurt here.

But either way, no matter how she felt, Charlotte's still Charlotte as she seriously helped me in cleaning up.

"Ugh, uu~"

"Ah, don't force yourself. I'll shift the table."

Speaking of which, that's Kishisato-san's table right? Her textbooks are all over the floor. Though she herself said that it's a 'fully-armored' table, there's all sorts of holes to this saying...

"No, no problems! I'm an owner of a personal IS, so my physical ability compared to the rest is..."

Saying that, Charlotte lost to the weight and slipped. I immediately supported her body from behind.

"That was close...wouldn't that be adding insult to injury if you're hurt? See, just let me..."

"Uu, yeah, tha-thanks..."

As I slipped back to support Charlotte's back, the movement feels like I'm hugging her. Maybe she couldn't calm down because a guy's body's around her as her eyes seem to waver.

"Huh--sorry, I'm letting go then."

"Ah..."

Hm? Why do I feel that Charlotte sounded like she felt that it was a pity gesture, how come?

"...That was alright..."

"What?"

"No, nothing!"

"That's good."

Including what happened this morning, I really feel that today Charlotte's been acting strange.

(Wa, wa, my heart's beating so fast...my face, is my face alright? I'm not showing any strange expression, right?)

Though they were punished to clean the classroom, the fact that Charlotte got the dream sequence of being alone together naturally made her heart beat faster.

The classroom that's dyed orange suddenly overlapped with the scene Charlotte saw in the morning, causing even her ears to become red.

At this moment, she also realized that the heat on her face is such that she would be giving off hot air, and that the calm demeanour she would usually show is no longer present.

(Wha-What should I do...got to say something, uu, but I really can't say anything, and I don't know what to say...)

"Oh yea--"

"KYAAHH!"

Ichika's sudden words caused Charlotte to react in shock since her voice went embarrassingly high-pitched. As the voice was too weird, she immediately covered her own mouth after making that sound.

"Wha-What's wrong? Letting out such a strange sound ..."

"It-It's nothing! Nothing at all!! I-I was just thinking about something, that's all..."

"Really? That's good."

Seemingly without any suspicion, Ichika moves the table. After putting these things back onto the original position, the cleaning was finished. Thinking about this, Charlotte starts to feel an inexplicable loneliness.

"I've felt something weird since last month started, so I should ask you now."

"Uu? Oh yes, what is it?"

"Huh...when you said to me that 'please call me Charlotte when we're alone', I thought that you intended to continue your disguise as a guy. The next day, you just returned back to your girl identity, so I was wondering if something happened..."

"Ah, huh, well, that, that's..."

As for the details to this, Charlotte really has difficulty saying it out. Normally, she would just answer simply, but today, she's been stuttering all day long.

"Ah, it's not that. It's fine that you don't want to answer, it's just that I feel weird about it."

"Do-Do you care about that...?"

"Of course I do."

"Is-Is that so...I see."

Huh...even though she felt puzzled, Charlotte tried to think of a suitable vocabulary. After exchanging looks with Ichika many times, she finally decided on it and said,

"Well, I hope that Ichika can seriously..."

Even though her face immediately blushed, Charlotte continued to stare at Ichika and say,

"...treat me like a girl. So, when I'm a girl while we're alone, I don't know if it's weird or despicable...but, that, an-anyway, you're the reason, Ichika."

"Is-Is that so? I'm really sorry then..."

"The-There's nothing to be sorry about..."

After saying that, Charlotte turned her face to look at the window. Even under the shine of the orange sunset, her face still looked exceptionally red.

"But I did seriously treat Charlotte as a girl."

"Huh? You mean..."

As Charlotte heard something unexpected, her heart began to pound crazily. But at this point, while the girl in her teenage years was a little expectant for him to step forward, the blockhead of the blockheads, Orimura Ichika, stood there.

"Because you're not a guy."

*KRAU*, *KRAU*. A crow flew behind Charlotte. Well , it didn't actually fly by, but it sounded like a dumbfounded crow's cry.

(Uuu~! Ichika, you, Ichika, you...!)

Recovering herself, Charlotte felt like stomping deep inside her heart, and her face was red from anger instead of the emotion just now.

However, she couldn't say it out clearly, or rather, she couldn't say it out at all, so she ended up at her wits end like this. In fact, she was about to suspect if Ichika was deliberately doing this.

Speaking of which, it was because he didn't do it on purpose that made it irritating. He's definitely a big blockhead, yet he would say things that will make people nervous, causing Charlotte's face to instantly become like a hot water boiler all the time. It was the same this morning; hearing him suddenly say that she's cute, causing her heart to nearly pop out at that moment.

(Never mind...that...I'm really happy...)

But really, she just wished that he would just say those things to her. She knows that it's difficult, yet she

couldn't help but continue to wish for this. It's really a girl's complicated feelings.

"But now, the name you asked me to call you has become normal already. Don't you want a nickname?"

"Huh, can-can I?"

"If Charlotte doesn't mind."

On hearing Ichika's answer, Charlotte immediately nodded her head forcefully.

"Yeah, okay! I have no objections at all! It-It's rare to have this chance, so I'll leave it to you!"

As she was excited and shocked, Charlotte's voice accidentally went high by half an octave. In order not to let him realize this, Charlotte tried to act as calm as possible, yet her heart was already showing a scene of a blooming flower field.

(WA~! WHA-WHAT'S GOING ON? WHAT'S WITH ICHIKA!? SUDDEN-SUDDENLY SAYING THAT, I HAVEN'T EVEN GOTTEN MY HEART READY YET...

AHHH!! BUT...THA-THAT MEANS THAT HE-HE L-LI-LIK-LIKES ME, RIGHT? I'M RIGHT, RIGHT? AM I!?)

As she was overly excited, Charlotte nearly let out a strange sound, which she clears her throat to hide it as she awaited Ichika's words with expectant feelings.

"Let me think. Mn, how about Charl? It's nice and intimate."

"Charl--okay! It's great! It's very good!"

"Is-Is that so? Having such a large reaction, I guess you like it."

"It-It's okay, Charl...Charl, ufufufufu~"

Right now in the flower field in her heart, there are 4 large-head chibi-Charls holding hands and dancing. If subtitles are allowed, there would be a 'please hold on a moment'.

"--Then Charl, I got something I would like to ask you..."

"Hm? What is it?"

Ichika suddenly grabbed Charlotte's hand forcefully while she's smiling in her own happiness.

As Charlotte had a '?' pop out above her head due to this sudden action, Ichika closes in with a serious expression and says to her,

"Go out with me."

"Huh?"

Charlotte heard the world stop.

"Oh, the weather's great today!"

It's Sunday. The weather's clear. That's great.

To prepare for the seaside school that's starting next week, a certain girl arrived on a street. As for that girl--

"..."

Charlotte is--or Charl is giving an unhappy look.

"...I just heard my dream shatter..."

I don't know what happened, but she's been like this ever since morning started. I don't know whether she's listless or just moody, but she's been looking like that.

On a side note, Charl's wearing a short-sleeved white shirt that's suited for summer, and she's wearing a cutie-top that's of the same color as the skirt. That light cream skirt is short, sufficiently showing her healthy leg outlines.

--Mn, very cute! Especially the elegance of the matching colors, they do look classy and trendy.

"What's wrong Charl? Are you feeling sick?"

As I peered over worriedly, she forcefully pushed my face away,

"..."

And doesn't say anything. However, her eyes seem like she's blaming me badly.

"Charl, that's--"

"Ichika."

"Ye-Yes?"

"Those guys who play with girls' feelings should be stomped to death by horses."

WAH, SUCH INTENSE WORDS!

But as for that, I agree with that all the way. Even if it's not a girl, fooling with other people's feelings like that is still bad and goes against morals. This kind of guy can't even support himself, let alone others.

"Yeah, such a guy should just die."

"Go look into a mirror!"

Hm? Is my hair messy? Not good, this can't do.

"Sigh...beside, besides, you just asked me to go accompany you to buy something. Ahh, I feel that you said something similar last month, Ichika...haa~..."

Wahh, she just sighed deeper than 20,000 meters deep into the ocean. Wha-What should I do? Is it really a hassle to go out with me?

"Huh...about that...I'm sorry, but, it's alright not to force yourself like that, you know? If you're really feeling unwell, we can always go back to rest. Health is first priority."

"..."

Charlotte continued to stare at me as she gave off a silent pressure. What's with this oppressing feeling? It's making me feel painful.

Because it's painful, I started making some ridiculous concessions,

"Huh, well, to thank you, I'll treat you to parfait at the shop in front of the station."

"Just the parfait?"

"An-And cake! And drinks!"

"Good. Also, this."

After that, she suddenly reached her hand out. Hm? Hold hands? It's not that I can't. For some reason, I feel that she just let out a sharp glare.

Huh...got to think. Think fast! Me!

"I won't argue with you if you're willing to hold hands with me."

"Ohh, so that's how it is. Okay."

Speaking of which, this is a street she's unfamiliar with , and since she's in a foreign land, it would be really bad if we lose each other. It's Sunday, the day when everyone's resting, so there're a lot of people.

Thus, to prevent this, Charl actually thought of holding hands. She sure can think fast. I have to learn from her more.

"..."

Huh? That's strange? Why did Charl suddenly become so silent? For some reason, I find that she looks different, her face just seemingly blushed, and her eyes are wavering. Does she have a cold?

"Are you alright?"

"KYAH! Wh-Who-Who're you asking?"

"Huh, you. Do you want to go back to rest?"

"No, no need! I'm alright, I'm good, no problem! Le-Let's go!"

Being dragged by Charl as she suddenly took large strides, I follow her to the train station.

Even so, right now, Charl's hand that's holding onto mine is a lot slender than expected. It contains the warmth of a woman, causing my heart to beat ridiculously.

"..."

"..."

Two figures were hidden in the shadows, noticing Ichika and Charlotte walk towards the station.

As both of them passed the crossing with the green light on and disappeared into the crowd, those two figures used the opportunity to appear from the tress.

One of them had a pair of lively ponytails, and the other one had elegant blond hair. In other words, they were Rin and Cecilia.

"...I say."

"...What is it?"

"...Well, did they just hold hands?"

"...They did."

Even if they asked 100 people, they would get 100 same answers. Cecilia lets out a spastic smile as she holds onto the PET bottle. *PACK!* The bottlecap flew up!

"Is that so? That happened, right. I didn't see it wrongly, and I wasn't daydreaming. So that happened--alright, let's kill him."

Rin clenched her fist, and the IS was partially deployed on it as she got ready to battle. There were about 2 seconds before the Impact Cannons were fired.

Girls' naive feelings can be that terrifying.

"Oh, seems like you're having fun. Let me join in."

""!""

The voice of the person behind them caught them off guard.

Standing over there was the opponent that caused Rin and Cecilia to suffer defeat, the one person they would never forget, Laura.

"KYAH! Wh-When did you appear there?"

"Don't be so wary, I don't have any intention to have it at you for now."

"Who-Who would believe that! If you want to battle again, I'll accept it willingly!"

Having been beaten in a 2vs1 match, Rin and Cecilia began feeling suspicious, but in contrast to their reaction, Laura didn't seem to mind as she replied,

"About that? Oh well, I forgive you."

Hearing her say that casually, both of them just remained rooted to the spot, unable to respond to what she said. However, they immediately recovered.

"Wha-What forgiveness, you...!"

"Who would say 'Is that so? I got it?' after hearing you say that...!"

"Is that so? I'm going after Ichika then. Got to make a move first."

As Laura really made a move after she said that, Rin and Cecilia frantically stopped her.

"Wa-Wait-Wait a minute!"

"Tha-That's right, what are you going to say after catching up to them?"

"It's obvious, right? I just want to tell them that I'm joining in."

Hearing Laura's direct response, both of them cowed back. As her response was so direct, they didn't know whether they should be unhappy or envious.

"Wa-Wai-Wait a minute! If you want to fight against an unknown enemy, we have to collect information first, right?"

"Well, that's true. What do we do?"

"So we should tail them from behind and observe what state they're in."

"I see. Let's do it."

Thus, under ridiculous reasons, they became the mysterious 3 stalkers.

"Let me see...the swimsuit're over here."

Right now, we're standing at the 2nd level of the shopping center in front of the station. Being the transport hub here, it's easy to find anything, whether it's the train, subway, public bus, taxis or whatsoever. This place is accessible from every single place in the city, and can allow access to any place in the city.

Also, this shopping center 'Resonance' that links to the station and the surrounding underground streets has all sorts of restaurants, whether it's European, Chinese, or Japanese. The shops selling clothes have all sorts of top class international brands. Also, there're all sorts of

entertainment facilities for all ages. It's been described as 'if you can't find it here, you can't possibly find it anywhere else'. It's that simple, no wait, it's extremely glamorous.

On a side note, this place is linked to the station, and yet I called it 'in front of the station', which makes it unbelievable. However, this is already 'in front of the shop' since the beginning, so it can't be helped. In middle school, Dan, Rin and I would often come here after school. Such fond memories.

"Oh yeah, Charl, do you want a swimsuit?"

"This, well, that...Ichika, well, do you want to see me in a swimsuit?"

Hm? She just asked a weird question. Wouldn't the main point be whether you want to swim instead of asking me if I want to look at it? Charl can be really be weird at times.

"Well, since it's rare, let's go for a swim. I haven't been to the seaside for a long time, so I'm really looking forward to it."

"I-I see. Th-The-Then, since we're here, I'll just buy a new one then."

Charl slightly increased the force of her grip as she nods a few times. Maybe she's feeling excited about being able to swim after a long time? Speaking of summer, we can't miss out the sea, the watermelon and the fireworks. That's right, that's right.

"Well, the guys and the girls have different areas to shop, so let's separate here."

"Ah..."

As I let my hand go, Charl let out a sound as if she missed it. After that, she has 'that kiddy look of wanting something but can't say it' as she stares at me.

"Huh-what's wrong?"

"Ah, nothing, nothing at all."

"That's good. We'll meet back here in 30 minutes."

"Mn, got it."

Charl nods her head in understanding and heads off to the girls' swimsuit area. Just looking at those arrays of colorful swimsuits, it makes me feel like I'm in a Southern country.

"No, hold on, I need to choose my own swimsuit as well."

Good thing I saved up quite a bit of personal money as I went working during middle school, and now that I'm living in the IS dorms, the meals, electricity and gas are all free. Ahh, how is it that this unique independent school IS Academy is run by Japan so brilliantly.

Speaking of which, I haven't chosen swimming trunks for a long time. I feel that there's a ridiculous sort of colors, but I just chose a simple navy blue swimming trunks.

(Mn, that can do. There's still 10 minutes, but let's go wait for her.)

Thinking about this, I return back to where I left Charl. Unexpectedly, she's already waiting for me.

"That's strange. You're fast. Is everything complete?"

"Ah, no, well...I want Ichika to choose for me."

"Really? Let's go look at it then."

Saying that, we arrive at the female swimsuit area. But, what should I say? The colors, the styles or whatever, the number of women's swimsuit far exceed the number of men. Seeing such a huge variety of them, I inadvertently backed away with 3 large steps.

(Uu, but since Charl wants me to give her suggestions, I'll just endure it for now...)

As today's Sunday, there're female customers all over. They seem to immediately notice a guy walking into a place where female goods are sold.

"Over there."

"Hn?"

Looking around, Charl and I are only ones standing here.

"I'm calling you, man! Arrange the swimsuits here!"

A woman whose name I don't know suddenly said to me. 10 years after the introduction of IS, the female superiority quickly spread throughout the world, and every country treats women better. When guys walk down the streets, they will be ordered to do something by someone they don't know. But I--

"What? Just do it on your own! If people like to order other people to do things, humanity will became dumb!"

I hate this the most. Forget about it if it's a friend I know, but when I don't know the person, I don't think I have the need to listen to this, and I don't want to follow it.

"Oh, do you want to say that? It seems that you don't really understand your own circumstances."

After that, the female customer intends to call the guards. Right now, this is a women superiority society, so if she says something like 'he suddenly exerted violence on me', I don't need to defend myself and will be deemed as guilty.

That's how society is right now.

"Sorry, can you hold it here. I (boku)--I (watashi) brought him here."

Charl entered at the right time. Since both of them, are females, things won't go out of hand.

"He's your man? At least train him better!"

Wah, you heard that? That's basically men=dogs!

On a side note, only a few females would be this arrogant. Most females would still think that men are of equal standing to certain extents. However, that attitude was obviously out of the thought that 'men have to help women do things'.

"Really, it's because you people never trained them properly that men would..."

The female customer grumbled as she left. What's wrong? Did she end up meeting something irritating? A stressful society's really isn't good for humans.

"Sorry Ichika for making you meet such unpleasant things."

"Hm? No problems. I'm the one who should be thanking you for saving my life."

"That's to be expected! That, well...can you help me choose a swimsuit?"

"Okay."

Now that I answered that, Charl dragged me over. Feeling puzzled, I got dragged by Charl to the changing room...huh? Hold on? Charl-san?

"We-Well, I can't tell if a swimsuit's suitable if I don't buy it...right?"

No, that...well, even if you ask me that, I can't answer that easily...

But I just seem to notice that there's a large promotional board with the notice 'females can try this', which seems to make this popular. Also, it seems that those that were worn before will be washed by the staff. Ohh, how luxurious. Female superiority has extended to such levels.

"I-I'll be done soon. Just wait for me."

"Huh, then I'll go outside--"

"No, no you can't!"

No, even if you say so, I...

"It-It's okay, I won't take too much time."

Charl said this as she started taking off her shirt.

"WAAH!!"

I immediately turn my back on Charl.

In the crammed changing room, only Charl and I are here. And no matter how unwilling I am, I can hear the sound of clothing being rubbed, which makes my heart beat faster. And since the space is so crammed, I can immediately detect the sweet smell only girls have...ugh, no! Got to remain calm.

"Ah. Cha-Charl?"

"Wha-What is it?"

"Huh..."

Though I really want to ask how it ended up like this, I'm hesitating on whether I should say it, so it's became a situation in which I don't know what to say.

"Mm..."

*Pasari*. I hear something light land on the clothing or something. Don't tell me that's--no, doesn't matter whether I can hear it. Was that the sound of underwear being taken off?

WAAHH!! Instead of being troubled wondering what I should do, maybe I should ask Charl what's she's doing, right?

(Uu, I did this out of impulse, but what should I do next...)

Speaking of which, the reason why it ended up like this was because Charlotte noticed three people trailing her.

The IS Core Network is a unique network that links together. IS was developed for space exploration, so even if they are a galaxy apart, they can accurately detect each others position, so the network had the specialty of identifying each others location.

Of course, to accurately detect each others location, they have to get authorization. But even without it, one can tell roughly where they are.

However, if one wants to avoid being detected by the Core Network, they can use what's called a stealth mode.

'All three are using stealth mode, impossible to detect where they are'. In other words, they're 'at a place where they don't want to let other people know where they are'. Thus, Charlotte could tell that they were 'following her from behind'. As Laura, who was in the Army before, was amongst them, they wouldn't commit such a stupid mistake as being spotted. However, Charlotte had an amazing perception, and so this deduction was just easy.

(Hn~ can't the three of them go back...?)

Either way, it's now here time to go out with Ichika alone. In other words, it's a date. *Right now, let's not bother about what Ichika thinks.* Charlotte just thought of this.

The movements of youthful girls couldn't be underestimated. Even if it was just in her mind, such a pressure was still active.

(Bu-But, changing clothes in the same room is definitely too much...)

She blushed as she looked back at Ichika. It seemed that he didn't know how to deal with this as well as he's been looking up at the ceiling for no good reason.

(Uu...does he find think I-I'm a very weird girl?)

Besides, she was changing in a room that didn't have anybody of the opposite gender, and there would be a moment when she would be completely naked, so it's impossible not to be embarrassed.

She grabbed the jewellery in front of her chest, the Cross-shaped jewellery that was the Revive's standby mode, tightly in her chest.

(But, but then, Ichika's basically a Dreadnought level blockhead! If I don't do this...ahh, forget about it. Let's just do it!)

After blushing, Charlotte decided on it and removed her underwear down the legs. After putting them on her clothes, she puts on the swimsuit on her naked body.

Oh yes, as for the English battleship 'Dreadnought' that was built in 1906, the official records never mentioned that it was a blockhead. In truth, it was not a human to begin with, so please bear with this.

"I-I'm done..."

"O-Okay..."

She brought him here to see herself in a swimsuit, so it was treated as something to be expected. But the moment her body sensed Ichika's stare, Charlotte started to feel uneasy. In order to hide this emotion, she rubbed her fingers together, anxiously waiting for Ichika's thoughts.

"..."

Up till now, Ichika, who's the crux to all these, is hit with the triple attack of 'being alone with a girl', 'a girl is changing clothes' and 'a bikini look' in this enclosed space, which bothered him, or rather, made him embarrassed.

(Wh-Why isn't Ichika saying anything? Is-Is the swimsuit weird? We-Well, looking at it closely, this is a really bold bikini...)

That was a swimsuit that had been designed as a mix between a two-piece and a one piece. The two pieces at the top and bottom were linked through a cross at the back. It was that kind of a design. As for the color, it was bright yellow, which made one think of the summer. The front design seemed to be emphasizing on the busty breasts.

"The-Then, there's another piece, actually--"

"No, no need for that! Isn't this suitable? Mn, that's good, Charl!"

Ichika was starting to get wary about her changing again, and accidentally said such words in reflex.

Those words weren't something that would make the opposite gender happy, but on hearing Ichika stammer frantically, Charlotte felt like she got praised.

"I-I'll be choosing this then!"

"O-Okay. I'm going out then."

This time, before Charlotte could stop him, Ichika opened the door and got ready to leave the changing room.

"Huh?"

"Huh?"

"HUUUH?"

Standing at the door was actually the vice-homeroom teacher of class 1, Yamada Maya-sensei. Then, behind her

, Chifuyu noticed that there was something going on and pressed her head.

"Idiot, what are you..."

The next moment, Yamada-sensei sank into a light frenzy, and her shrill scream echoed throughout the room.

"Oh, so you're here to buy swimsuits. But two people entering a changing room together is totally unacceptable ! It's not alright even on the educational aspect!"

"So-Sorry..."

Charl lowered her head and apologized. Well, I seem to find that's she's been getting scolded a lot nowadays, and all because of me. Uu, sorry.

"Oh yeah, Yamada-sensei, Chifu--ahem, Orimura-sensei, why are you here?"

I tried to divert the topic and explain the doubts. Man, I'm good.

"We're here to buy swimsuits. Al-Also, we're not on duty now, so there's no need to force yourself to call us senseis."

Well, even if she says that...naa, it's alright for Yamada-sensei, but even though Chifuyu-nee's wearing somewhat casual clothes, she's wearing a summer suit. Especially in this situation with other people around, I would likely get scolded if I just call her 'Chifuyu-nee'.

At this moment--

"You people should come out now, right?"

I seemed to hear a 'gulp'. No, maybe I'm just thinking too much.

"We-We were intending to come out."

"Tha-That's right! We were waiting for the right time!"

And thus, two people appeared from behind the pillar. They're Rin and Cecilia.

"And why are both of you being so sneaky? I wonder?"

"Girls don't want guys to know their shopping plans!"

"Tha-That's right! Really, Ichika really has got so much nerve that it's mindboggling."

Wa--for some reason, I got blamed badly. I shouldn't have asked.

"Make your purchase and go back."

Chifuyu-nee's seems to be holding onto a swimsuit. It seems like she's like Yamada-sensei, making her final preparations.

"Ah, ah--I got something I forgot to buy! I'll go buy it! Umm, I don't know where it is. Rin-san, Alcott-san, please follow me! Dunois-san too!"

Y-Yeah? What's with Yamada-sensei all of a sudden? As I sensed a flash in her eyes, she dragged the three girls away without allowing any protests.

With that, only Chifuyu-nee and I are here. The mysterious silence remains around us for several seconds .

"...Really, Yamada-sensei's way too sensitive."

"What?"

"Sigh...anyway, it's meaningless to say such words now. Ichika."

"Wha-What is it? Orimura-sensei?"

As I hadn't heard her call my name for a long time, I accidentally made a stiff response. Chifuyu-nee just gave a stiff smile, probably seeing that my expression's weird.

"We're not having lessons now, so you can call me by my name. We're just normal siblings here."

"I-I got it."

Seems like this means to be together as sister and brother--or something like that? I really don't understand Yamada-sensei's concern.

"Then, Ichika, which swimsuit do you think is nicer?"

Saying that, Chifuyu-nee showed me two swimsuits that were hung on the clothes hangers.

One is a black sporty type with web-parts that's showing a sexy look.

On the other side, in contrast, it's a white one that cuts a lot of the look and focuses on the functions.

Both of them are bikinis, and they both reveal quite a lot.

(Well...the black one, I guess.)

Considering this, I suddenly noticed something.

If she puts on this black swimsuit, maybe she might attract a lot of weird guys, no, that's a certainty. The white swimsuit may be comparable, but that forbidden allure would definitely cause any guy to be unable to say something.

"--The white one"

I did try to say it as naturally as possible, but after hearing that, Chifuyu-nee's response has a bit of wryness to it,

"The black one, right?"

"No, the white--"

"Liar. You looked at the black one first! Ever since before, you would always look closely at the one you like , so I knew immediately."

Uu...I got seen through really easily.

"Really, there's no need to worry as a younger brother. Do I look like a woman who would succumb to those frivolous men?"

"No, not at all...but Chifuyu-nee, aren't you going to get a boyfriend? I never heard you mention it before..."

"Say that once my brother can be independent."

Uu, now that she said this, I have nothing to say. I tried working in middle school, but in the end, most of the living expenses--well, 90% came from Chifuyu-nee. Though I tried spending before, but...

*"Just use that money to get a gift for the girl you like."*

--But I got shot back like that. I don't have anyone I like!

"Then what about you?"

"Ah? Me? Why?"

"What why? Aren't you dating? Luckily, there's an abundance of girls in the school, so you can just choose as you like, right?"

What do you mean by 'choose as you like'? Speaking of which, I used to think that 'choose as you like' was a type of color. Green (も, midori), yellow green (, kimidori ) and 'choose as you like(, yoridorimidori)'.

"Let me think...how's Laura? She's a really problematic kid, but she's an empathetic one. She looks good as well."

"No, that..."

"Besides, didn't you two kiss?"

UGH! DO YOU HAVE TO MENTION IT!? DAMN IT, IT SEEMS THAT I'LL SELF-DESTRUCT NO MATTER HOW I ANSWER.

Perhaps seeing that it's interesting to see me this embarrassed, Chifuyu-nee, who was giving a wry smile up till now, now unknowingly shows a slight smile.

"It's nothing bad, you know."

"No, how should I say it? I don't really understand that ..."

"Oh, I see. Is she your type or not?"

"Well, I...uun. Well, I guess, she's pretty cute."

"Oh--"

"Laura's pretty cute--NO WAIT, WHAT DID YOU MAKE ME SAY!?"

"You just said it out, didn't you?"

UGH! That was the case. It feels like I was baited, but it's my fault for being baited in the first place.

"Never mind. Either way, before worrying about me, deal with your own problems first. I'm not so old that I need my younger brother to take care of me."

"Okay. I got it. I won't be worried about anything weird. Is that alright?"

"Mn, that can do."

After showing a smirk, Chifuyu-nee walks towards the cashier. I don't know whether I should follow her or wait here for Yamada-sensei and the rest to come back, so I just waited her for a while.

Rewinding time back to 10 minutes ago.

As compared to Charlotte's reaction, Ichika was simply too normal, so Rin, Cecilia and Laura, the trio of stalkers all noticed something,

"...Ahh, as usual, the blockheads of blockheads, Orimura Ichika."

With that, Laura feels that they're about to be discovered at this rate, and didn't want to continue.

Thinking this way, she left Rin and Cecilia and headed towards the swimsuit area. As the large number of swimsuits form a wall, she doesn't need to worry about being noticed.

(Fum. Speaking of which, I don't have a swimsuit myself.)

*But it doesn't matter anyway. I can just wear the normal school swimsuit.* Laura thought.

On a side note, the IS Academy designated swimsuit are of the endangered species, the sporty navy blue piece of art, the school one-piece swimsuit. On a side note, there's even a nametag on it.

(Doesn't matter anyway. If I can swim, I just need to wear something right? That swimsuit's functionality's rather good, so there's no need to find a replacement.)

Thinking about this, Laura stared at the swimsuits lined together with icy cold eyes, but at the next moment, her white skin immediately became red.

"Laura's pretty cute."

Because of Ichika's voice, of what he said, she suddenly turned around.

Laura knows that he and Chifuyu were talking to each other, but she disliked eavesdropping on others, so she didn't mind them and got hit hard.

"..."

The sudden words caused her face to be flushed red, her heart started beating like it was in 4th gear. *DOKI DOKITO, BAKU BAKUTO!!* The beating in her heart couldn't stop at all.

*You should praise me more.* Laura did say that to Ichika, but in fact, he never praised her before, so of course he never told her 'you're cute'.

But after hearing such sudden words, it's no wonder that the calm Laura who was called the German Ice would panic.

(Cu-Cut-Cute...? I'm, cute...cute...)

Ignoring the surroundings, Laura pressed her hand on her chest and closed her eyes. She gathered concentration that would normally be unrequired, and after mis-dialling a few times, she opened the IS private channel.

At the same time, in a German training facility, the IS special group 'Schwarzer Hase'--normally called 'Black Hares' were training.

There were ten IS in Germany, and this unit had three, which proved that they were the strongest squad.

The unit's seal was the 'Hare with an eyepatch'. With Laura as the leader, all the members had nanomachines inserted into their eye to improve IS computation. Though Laura's eyepatch was a function control, right now, all the members wore eyepatches to protect their eyes and for the pride of the unit.

"What are you doing!? You're late by 37 seconds!! Hurry up!!"

Growling angrily was the assistant commander, Clarissa Harfouch, 22 years old, the oldest in the squad. With so many members who were in their teenage years, she was a 'reliable big sis' who was strict and yet could involve everyone appropriately.

Her IS suit [Schwarzer Zweig] received a private channel signal from what amounted to a distress call.

"--Roger that. This is Lieutenant Clarissa Harfouch."

"It-It's me..."

Normally speaking, one has to report the name and rank, but as the other person's voice was wavering ridiculously, Clarissa inadvertently let out a stunned look.

"Commander Bodewig, have you encountered any difficulties?"

"Ah, ahh...there's-there's a major problem now..."

Listening to the tone of the speaker from the other side , Clarissa felt that things weren't that simple, and immediately used hand gestures to order 'end of training , emergency gathering'.

"--Do I need to bring the squad over?"

"No, no need, there's no need for the squad. It's, it's not military, anyway..."

"What is that?"

"Clarissa, well. Do-Do-Do I, look, cute...or not?"

...

"What?"

Clarissa's voice, which was rhythmically flat, just raised by half an octave. Facing the unknown sudden situation, the originally intense tone became what seemed to be dumbfounding words to them.

"I-Ichi-Ichika, he-he seemed to have said that, so..."

Hearing this, Clarissa immediately remembered.

"Ohh, so it's Instructor Orimura's younger brother. Commander seems to have feelings for that guy."

"Uu, well...wha-what should I do, Clarissa? What should I do in this situation?"

"Well...let's understand the situation. Did he say that to you directly?"

"No, that's not it, I think he wouldn't expect me to be here..."

"--That's great."

"Is-Is that so?"

"Yes, praising someone when she's not around, that's definitely not a lie."

"I-I see...!"

Laura's voice, which was wavering up till now, seemed to bloom like a flower after hearing Clarissa's words.

On a side note, Clarissa had been chatting with her using the private channel and using a pen to pass the message to the other members at the same time.

**There's hope for the Commander and her crush.**

"OOOHHHHH~!!!!" More than 10 girls cried out.

--On a side note, Laura had a lot of interpersonal relationship problems with this squad, but after the VT incident last month, she started discussing with Clarissa that 'I have someone I like', and all walls vanished.

If there's a need to describe the situation--

"WHAAAT!! THAT-THAT COMMANDER, LIKES, A...A GUY!!!?"

"I THOUGHT SHE REALLY LIKED INSTRUCTOR ORIMURA...!"

"Yeah, yeah, I thought so as well. But, well, that commander, I'm talking about her now. She actually asked 'What should I do to a-attract a-a guy...?'!"

"""KYAAAHHHH!!!"""

"So I seriously taught her! I told her that there's a culture of 'taking the person you like as your bride' in Japan!"

"AS EXPECTED OF THE VICE-COMMANDER! SHE'S REALLY FAMILIAR WITH JAPAN!"

"Of course, I didn't just read Japanese Shoujo manga just to put a front or because of curiosity!"

"SO-SO COOL...!"

"I LOVE THIS COOL VICE-COMMANDER!"

"BUT I LIKE THE CUTE COMMANDER EVEN MORE !"

"THAT'S RIGHT! ME TOO!! AHH, WHY COULDN'T WE LINK WITH HER WHEN SHE WAS IN THE COUNTRY!?"

"I REMEMBER THAT THEY COOK RED RICE IN JAPAN AT THIS TIME!"[3A 11]

"I guess so? It probably means that the blood is thicker than what, or something like that."

"AS EXPECTED OF JAPAN, IT'S REALLY EXCITING!!"

"IT'S WORTHY OF ADMIRATION!!"

"ALRIGHT, EVERYONE, THAT'S IT FOR TRAINING TODAY! LET'S HEAD TO THE ARMY CANTEEN AND COOK RED RICE TOGETHER!"

""""YES! VICE-COMMANDER!!!""""

--It was that sort of feeling. As expected of girls in their teenager years (a small group of them are 20+). Everyone would argue because of trivial matters, and would patch up because of trivial matters.

"An-And then, I-I'm at, that-that place where they're selling, swimsuits now..."

"Oh, swimsuits! Oh yeah, you have a seaside school next week. What will you be wearing then, commander?"

"U, un? The school issued swimsuit--"

"ARE YOU STUPID!!"

"!"

"I remember that the IS Academy has the old-fashioned sports swimsuit, so it isn't bad, or not... guys more or less would be aroused by it. But...that's--"

"That-That's...?"

Laura forcefully swallows her saliva.

"THAT'S NOT GOING TO BREAK THROUGH THE LINE OF EROTISM!!"

"Wha...?"

"It's true that commander can't use voluptous curves to trap men, but if you give up on this opportunity, you can't progress with 'that guy you have feelings for'!"

"The-Then...what should I do?"

"Fuu, I have a secret weapon."

As even her words were burning with passion, Clarissa let out a glint in her eye.

## Chapter 2: Ocean's Eleven - 11 O'Clock Sea!

"I can see the sea!"

As the bus went through the tunnel, the girls in the class shouted out.

It's the first day of the seaside school, and fortunately, today the weather's clear . The sea that's reflecting the sunlight off is rather stable, with the sea breeze gently swaying it.

"Ohh--seeing the sea sure makes me excited!"

"Uu, uu? Yeah."

On the bus, Charl's sitting beside me. But it's been like ever since we departed; I haven't heard her say much. Right now, it's the same as well. After she finished answering, she immediately focused on her hand.

"So you really like that?"

"Huh? Ah, mn, okay. Hehe."

The bracelet that Charl's wearing on the left wrist was a gift I bought for her for shopping with me. She

continues to smile at that silver bracelet, sometimes pondering and letting out a laugh.

Even so, seeing her liking it so much, I'm rather sorry that I didn't get her something more expensive. Even though I chose it because she said 'Ichika, you just need to get me something you feel it suits me', is that really alright?

"Ufufufu♪"

Mn. She's in a good mood.

"Really, Charlotte-san's been in a good mood since this morning started."

On the other side of the corridor, Cecilia said that with an unhappy look.

"Mn, that's right. I'm sorry. Ehehe..."

Charl didn't even care about what Cecilia said as she continues to smile. Mn, she's in a really good mood, so much that it's scary, huh? Is she really looking forward to the seaside? I'm looking forward to it though.

"I thought both of you separated midway through yesterday. You two unexpectedly went off to buy a gift... that's so unfair."

"Ah-...oh, that, I'll get one for Cecilia next time when we have a chance, okay?"

Seems like Cecilia really wants one as well? No need to be so awkward.

"Are-Are we set?"

"Mn, but I can't buy one too expensive."

Maybe my promise made her happy for a while, as Cecilia says,

"If that happens...well, I'll forgive you."

And she let me off. But if I have to spend money frequently now, it means that I'll have to find work and earn money. I don't want to spend all my savings.

"..."

Speaking of which, unbelievably, Laura's been sitting beside Cecilia quietly. I don't know if she's feeling unwell , but she would look around in a suspicious manner.

"Are you alright? You've been like this since yesterday. What's wrong?"

"..."

"Hey, Laura? He-y!"

As I could barely get a response, I got up from my seat and peered at her face.

"!? Wha-What...what are you doing? You, you're too close! Idiot!"

"NUWAH!!"

My nose got forcefully pushed by her, causing me to make a weird sound. I don't know whether Laura's having a flu or a fever as her face is slightly blushed.

(Oh well. There's no need to worry. This person here can deal with her own, so it should be alright.)

As Laura seemed like she didn't have a problem, I turned to look at Houki, who was sitting behind Laura and said to her.

"We can swim later. Houki, you're rather good at swimming."

"Ye-Yeah. Ahh, it's because I used to go swimming often."

Hm? Why is Houki acting all weird out of a sudden? She's either unable to calm down or is fidgeting.

"We're about to reach our destination. Everyone, sit down."

The entire class immediately obeyed Chifuyu-nee's order. This leadership ability is really outstanding.

Just like Chifuyu-nee said, the bus soon reached the hotel. The 1st years of IS Academy scoot off the four buses in a chaotic manner and started to line up.

"Then, this is the Kagetsu resort. From today onwards, we're going to be in their care for 3 days, so everyone is to be more respectful and not let the staff's work increase. "

"""Thanks for taking care of us!!"""

After Chifuyu-nee finished speaking, everyone said their greetings. Our Academy seems to be taken care of by this resort every year, and the lady boss-san in the Japanese clothing bows at us politely,

"Alright, please move this way. The freshmen this year seem rather energetic. That's good."

She's probably about 30+ years old, and she gives off a hardworking woman vibe. Maybe it's because her profession makes her smile often, as she doesn't look like she became the lady boss of this place at all. She sure feels young.

"Oh my, is this the rumoured...?"

Meeting my eyes coincidentally, the lady boss asked Chifuyu-nee.

"Oh, yes, as there's a male student this year, it'll be hard for you to separate the baths. I'm really sorry."

"No no no, that's not the case. He's a fine boy. Feels reliable."

"That is 'just' the feeling. Hurry up and greet her, idiot!"

My head got pressed down forcefully.

"My-My name's Orimura Ichika. Nice to meet you."

"Hohoho, how polite. I'm Kiyosu Keiko."

After the lady boss said that, she bowed politely to me again. Her action is as full of presence as before, making me, who's powerless against mature women, really nervous.

"My younger brother here's really useless. Sorry to bother you."

"Oh my, I have to say, Orimura-sensei, you're really strict with your younger brother."

"Because I'm normally cleaning up the mess for him."

No, I don't think that it's that exaggerated. But I can't deny that it's the case sometimes. Ahh...I really want to grow up and not burden Chifuyu-nee...

"Then, please head towards your rooms. There's a changing room at the annex. All students who want to go to the beach, please head there to change. If you aren't clear on where it is, you are welcome to ask the staff members."

After the girls answered 'yes--', they immediately walked into the resort. Anyway, we have to put our luggage down before doing anything else.

On a side note, it's free and easy for the entire first day, so as for meals, everyone has to go to the resort's restaurant.

"A-Ahe-Ahem--Orimu~"

Huh? This manner of calling me, it must be that Nohohon-san[3B 1], right? Looking behind me, she's the same as normal, moving towards me at a snail's pace. That sleepy look of hers is most probably real.

"Where's Orimura's room~? The room plan never indicated it. I want to play with you, so hurry up and tell me~"

As she said that, I knew the girls around me immediately pricked their ears. But what can they do even after knowing where my room is? There's nothing interesting in the room. Maybe.

"Well, I don't know. Maybe I'll sleep on the corridor?"

"Wa--, that's great~ let me sleep! Ahh--the floor's so cool~"

Since it's summer, maybe that's it...no, it's impossible.

On a side note, as it seems that I can't sleep with other girls, my room seems to be located some place else. The reason why I said 'seems' is because Yamada-sensei only told me that. She didn't tell me any specifics.

"Orimura. Here's your room. Follow me."

Oh, Chifuyu-nee's calling me. I can't keep her waiting for too long, so I just said to Nohohon-san 'Please wait a bit' and separated from her.

"Well, Orimura-sensei, where's my room?"

"Shut up and follow me."

Uu, I was suddenly forced to shut up. On a side note, this resort's rather spacious and wide. It's already amazing that this can take the entire batch of students this year. The interior decors successfully blend the interior decorations and the latest facilities. The optimized air temperature regulator's simply brilliant! Even the corridor's rather cooling, making one comfortable.

"Over here."

"Huh? This is..."

Pasted on the door is the paper with the words 'Staff room'. U-mm...?

"The initial plan was to give you a single room, but if we do that, there will be girls who will ignore the lights out timing and stay in your room."

*Haiz*. Chifuyu-nee sighed, and continued,

"So in the end, you'll be rooming with me. That way, the girls won't approach you that easily."

"Well...I guess?"

Nothing ventured, nothing gained. But even if that's the case, I don't think there's anyone brave enough to barge into the demon's lair for someone like me, right?

"Let's make this clear first. I'm a teacher, don't forget that."

"Yes, Orimura-sensei."

"That's good."

Thus, she allowed me to enter the room. It's a twin person's room, but the room itself is rather spacious. The wall is a shoji door[3B 2], and the scenery from here is beautiful. The entire sea's right in front of me. As the room's facing East, I can definitely see a beautiful sunrise .

"Oohh, amazing--"

Besides that, the bathroom is isolated from the room, and even the sink has its own room. The luxurious bathtub is so big that this guy here can extend his legs out.

"The large bath can be used, but you must use it according to timing. The plan was to separate guys from

girls, but since it involves all the students in this batch, it will be too weird if everyone's to feel uncomfortable because of you. Thus, you can only use it at certain times. If you want to take a bath during the middle of the night or in the morning, do it in the room."

"Got it."

Even though there's only the two of us, Chifuyu-nee's still fulfilling her duty. That's exactly how she works. Had she not mentioned it before, I would have called her 'Chifuyu-nee' already.

"Alright, it's free and easy today. We've put down our luggage as well. You can do whatever you want."

"Huh? What about you, Orimura-sensei?"

"I still need to contact and check with the other teachers. There's a lot of things to deal with. However, well--"

Ahem. Chifuyu-nee clears her throat.

"Anyway, I intend to swim. Besides, a certain little brother specially chose a swimsuit for me."

"I see."

Though I answered briefly like Chifuyu-nee, it made my heart beat a little faster, *doki* *doki*. I'm happy that she would wear the swimsuit I chose for her. Speaking of which, how many years has it been since I last saw Chifuyu-nee in a swimsuit? Uu...

*Knock knock*. My thoughts got interrupted by the knocking on the door.

"Excuse me, Orimura-sensei. Can I bother you for a while?"

That voice definitely belongs to Yamada-sensei.

"Sure, please enter."

On hearing Chifuyu-nee's answer, Yamada-sensei opened the door, and met my eyes as I'm standing opposite the door.

"WAH! ORIMURA-KUN!"

"Huh, you don't have to be that shocked..."

It seems that she came here to deal with teaching stuff, as Yamada-sensei seemed like she was looking through some documents as she entered, and then lifted her head up and saw me.

"So-Sorry! I forgot that Orimura-kun's sleeping in Orimura-sensei's room!"

"Yamada-sensei, I thought that was your idea, right?"

"Ye-Yes. That's right! Yes! I'm sorry!"

Being on the receiving end of Chifuyu-nee's sharp glare, Yamada-sensei looks like she got bitten by a snake.

"Alright, Orimura, we're going to work. You can go wherever you want, so enjoy yourself."

"Yes, I'll head to the beach as soon as possible."

"Don't play too much though."

After seriously replying to Chifuyu-nee's reminder, I left the room and pulled out my trunks, towel and change of underwear from the light backpack amongst my luggage.

Alright, let's go to the sea!

"..."

"..."

On the way to the changing room, Houki and I met coincidentally. This is nothing. The problem is the mysterious scene in front of us.

There are bunny ears sticking out from the ground. On a side note, I'm not talking about living bunny ears here, but 'rabbit ears' that bunny girls would wear. It's just that these bunny ears are white.

And there's even a 'Please pull' piece of paper stuck on it.

"Huh, is this--"

"I don't know, don't ask me. It has nothing to do with me."

Houki immediately denied it before I could even finish asking her. This means--yup, I'm correct.

Her talents are limitless, the genius amongst geniuses, the woman who self-proclaimed to have 35 hours a day, the developer of IS, and Houki's older sister. It's definitely Shinonono Tabane-san alright.

"Huh...I'm pulling, is that alright?"

"Do whatever you want. It doesn't involve me."

After saying that, Houki immediately left. Uu, it seems that her relationship with Tabane-san's is somewhat hard to repair.

Being left alone, I had no choice but to pull that pair of bunny ears.

*SUPAZ!!*

"WAAHHH!!"

I thought that Tabane-san would be hiding underground, so I forcefully pulled her out. But that's not the case, as I tumbled backwards due to the huge force.

"OWWW..."

"What are you doing?"

"Oh, Cecilia. It's nothing, I was just pulling these bunny ears--AH!"

My sight looks up at where the sound came from, but as I'm still on the floor, it means...that I'm looking up her skirt.

"!? I-ICHIKA-SAN!"

Noticing my gaze, Cecilia quickly pressed her skirt down and backed away. On a side note, huh...white with laces on the sides. NO WAIT, I'M A DOUCHEBAG! WHY COULD I SEE THAT CLEARLY!!?

"So-Sorry! Well, that, there were bunny ears over there, so I..."

"Wha-What?"

Cecilia asked back with a surprised voice. This can't be helped. If I were to hear others explain this to me, even I would feel that it's ridiculous. On a side note, as she's embarrassed and furious, her face is all flushed.

"No, Tabane-san is--"

*KIIIIIIIINNNN*...

Uu? What's with this thing that's flying at supersonic speed--hold on, UWAAHHH!!!

*DON--K!!*

An unidentified flying object drilled deeply into the ground, and it looks like--

""A-A carrot...?""

Cecilia and I said that together. Also, it looks like an illustration-style transforming carrot. Speaking of which, what's going on!?

"Ahahahaha! You got tricked, Ii-kun!!"

*PA!* The carrot split into half, and the person who appeared while laughing is the genius I mentioned before--Shinonono Tabane-san...can't she enter through a normal way?

"Well, when I used a missile to fly, I was nearly shot down by a certain country's scouting planes! I'm a creature who knows how to learn. Fui Fui!"

She's wearing a tightfitting blue and white skirt that's like the one in Alice in Wonderland. She takes the bunny ears from me and immediately puts them on. Is she acting the part of Alice in Wonderland alone? I really can't understand this person's theme of trends.

"Long-Long time no see, Tabane-san."

"Yup yup, it's been long, really long. Speaking of which, Ii-kun, where's Houki-chan? Were both of you together just now? Did she go to the bathroom?"

"Huh..."

She went off to escape from Tabane-san. I can't say it, so I really don't know how to answer her.

"Well, no problem. I can use just this little Houki-chan detector to find her! Bye bye Ii-kun. See you later!!"

Just like that, she vanished like the wind, and blazingly fast. On a side note, it seems that the Houki-chan detector she's talking about seems to be that pair of bunny ears. The detectors successfully turn towards where Houki went. No, wait, do detectors look like that?

"I-Ichika-san? Was that..."

"She's Tabane-san, Houki's older sister."

"Huh...WHAAT? That-That was Professor Shinonono? The professor who's currently missing and every country's looking for?"

"Yes, that Shinonono Tabane."

On a side note, this seaside school event has a theme called 'IS mobilization in unrestricted area', so there are all sorts of new models sent over from all countries. But as outside personnel are not allowed to participate, it seem that they can only transport them here through landing crafts.

However, as expected of Tabane-san, she likely ignored the rules completely and sneaked in, right? Speaking of which, what's her aim?

"Well, it seems like she's looking for Houki, so it looks like it's unrelated to me for now. Speaking of which, I'm going to the beach, what about you Cecilia?"

"Oh, okay, I'm going to the beach too. Oh-Oh yes!"

Ahem, Cecilia clears her throat. What's wrong? Is she trying to imitate Chifuyu-nee?

"I-I can't rub sunblock lotion on my back, so I want Ichika-san to help out...can you?"

"Hm? Can't you get a friend?"

"Huh? Ohh, that's true, but if possible...well, Ichika-san ..."

What's wrong? Is she still embarrassed that I just saw her underwear? Cecilia looks rather fidgety, and her eyes started wavering about.

"Mn, why don't you just don't apply it?"

"OBJECTION!!"

She immediately refused. I actually wanted to make a joke. Maybe it was the wrong timing? I would always make the girls angry when I joke with them.

"I'm joking, I'm joking! Well, if it's that kind of trivial stuff, I'd be glad to help."

"Re-Really? You won't take it back, right?"

Woah, is she really insistent on sunblock? She sounded really agitated even though I haven't even rubbed it on her.

"I got it. See you later then."

After nodding hard twice, Cecilia ran to the annex. She's not as fast as Tabane-san, but her footsteps are rather light.

"Alright. I'll go over then."

Of course, being a guy, I was told to use the inner most changing room in the annex's changing rooms. On a side note, once I leave that annex, I can go run all the way to the sea!!

(Huh, speaking of which...)

The inner most changing room--this means that I have to go past the female changing room. Of course, I won't be able to see what's inside, but the screams of excitement would be irresistible.

"WAH, MIKA! YOUR BREASTS ARE BIG!? YOU'RE STILL IN PUBERTY, RIGHT~?"

"KYAH!! DON'T-DON'T GRAB THEM!!"

"MENA'S SWIMSUIT'S RATHER BOLD. AMAZING~"

"REALLY? THIS IS COMMON IN AMERICA."

...

That's right. All these topics are being discussed casually. To be honest, I'm really afraid of hearing these. What should I say? Well, I'll be embarrassed, it's just that I don't know why.

I slightly increased my speed and headed towards the guys' changing room. Guys change clothes really easily, and I finished while thinking of what to do for warm-ups . Alright, time to head to the seaside!

"Ah, it's Orimura-kun!"

"AR-ARE YOU FOR REAL? IS-IS MY SWIMSUIT WEIRD? THERE'S NO PROBLEM, RIGHT?"

"Wa-Wahh~his physique's amazing~he did train~"

"Orimura-kun, let's play beach volleyball later~"

"Oh, if there's time later, okay."

Having just exited the changing room, I met a few girls who exited from the neighboring changing room. They're all wearing cute swimsuits, and the amount of skin they revealed really made me nervous.

And then, I take a step to the seaside--the sand that's baked hot by the July sun, and my soles got scalded.

"HOT HOT HOT HOT!!"

For someone like me who hasn't been to the beach for quite a few years, this feeling's really nostalgic and satisfying. That's right, this's how the beach should be like!

The bare feet of mine can feel the heat of the sand, causing me to curl my toes slightly as I walk towards the coast. The beach's already full of female students. Some are sunbathing, some are playing beach volleyball, some are swimming, everyone's doing all sorts of activities. They're all wearing swimsuits of many different colors, and in a certain sense, it's even more eye-blinding than the sun of July.

"He, ho..."

I start to do my warm-ups first. It's been a long time since I've been to the seaside. It'll be ugly if I get leg cramps and drown. Anyway, let's stretch the arms, contract the legs, stretch the back--

"I-chika~"

Oh--HUH, WHAT?

"You're rather serious, doing stretches so seriously. Okay, let's go swim once you're done!"

Suddenly jumping on my back is Rin. Speaking of which, whether it was primary school or middle school, she would always jump on me when she puts on a swimsuit. She's really like a cat.

On a side note, she's wearing a sports bikini. The orange swimsuit has white lining and reveals the bellybutton.

"Hey hey, do some warm-ups too! I don't care if you drown."

"I won't drown! I was a mermaid in my previous life, most likely."

She continued to pull as she quickly climbed up my body and sat on my shoulders. She was probably a cat or a monkey in her previous life, right? Also, the mermaid illustrations were drawn by men at first. Does she know that?

"Ohh--I'm so high up. I can see things far away from here clearly. It's great. You can be a mini-observation tower, Ichika."

Thanks. It's hard to find a job now anyway, so maybe this can do--WHAT, YOU IDIOT!!

"Not being a lookout worker, but a tower!?"

"What's wrong with that? It can benefit others anyway. "

"Who would climb up..."

"Mn...me?"

Rin chuckled. Ugh--this person.

"Ah-Ahh-Aahh! What, what are you two doing?"

Walking over here, Cecilia questioned us. She's holding onto the foldable beach umbrella, a beach mat and sunblock.

She's wearing a bright blue bikini, and the sari that's tied around her waist has a bit of elegance. It looks nice, just like a model. The ample breasts the swimsuit

emphasizes are more alluring than what I had imagined, thus I inadvertently looked away in embarrassment.

"Nothing much, just sitting on his shoulders. Or rather, he's acting as a movable watchtower."

"So you're actually acting."

"Of course, I don't have a license."

"Huh-that's true."

"Isn't that right? But if someone was drowning, I would still go and save her."

"Could-Could you please stop ignoring me!!"

Ohh, I suddenly started talking to Rin who's on my body. On a side note, I'm okay with her sticking to me like this, mainly--I can't say it to her directly-- 'cause her chest is super flat! Besides, she's been sitting on me like this since primary school, so I got very used to it.

"Anyway, Rin-san, hurry up and get off him!"

"No."

"What, what kind of childish tantrum are you throwing...!"

*PAZZ!* Cecilia stabs the beach umbrella into the sand . Woah, it seems like she's fuming!

"What's wrong? Is someone arguing?"

"Huh? Ah--! O-Orimura-kun has someone sitting on his shoulders!"

"Whaat? That's so nice, so nice~!"

"Must be by turn, right?"

"So the one who gets first will go first!"

I could randomly hear some quarreling girls seemingly creating a misunderstanding as they all squeezed over and asked me to let them sit on my shoulders. This is bad , this is really bad. If so many girls are to sit on my shoulders, it would be mentally draining for a guy, both physically and mentally.

"Rin, Rin, hurry up and get down. There will be misunderstandings."

"Hmm, well, it can't be helped."

Alright. Rin jumped down from my shoulders and used her hands to land before flipping forward. Amazing , she's practically the same as a cat.

"Rin-san...? Wasn't that against the rules...?"

Cecilia's showing a stiff smile. She must be fuming.

On a side note, I'm explaining to the girls gathering here 'I don't provide such services'. Sigh, it's all because of Rin.

"Speaking of which, Cecilia, you definitely asked Ichika to do something for you, right? We're even now, aren't we?"

"No, that..."

"Huh? You didn't ask him to do something? Then, I'll--"

"I-I did! ICHIKA-SAN, HURRY OVER AND HELP ME APPLY SUNBLOCK!"

""""WHAAT!!!???""""

Cecilia said that while I was explaining to the girls, causing them to shout out. Ahh, you idiot! Why did you say that so loudly...

"I'LL GET THE SUNBLOCK!"

"I'LL GET THE BEACH MAT!"

"I'LL GET THE BEACH UMBRELLA!"

"I'LL WASH THE SUNBLOCK OFF THEN!"

Hey! Since you already applied it, stop deliberately increasing my workload! *sigh*, that girl went into the sea. Heeeeey...

Anyway, the girls who gathered here because of Rin dispersed because of Cecilia.

"Ahem, I'll leave it to you then."

Cecilia gently takes off her sari. The action itself looked bewitching, causing my heart to skip a beat.

"Huh, erm...just the back, right?"

"If-If Ichika-san wants, you can apply it on the front as well."

"No, well, just let me apply it on the back."

"If that's the case--"

Cecilia suddenly undoes the swimsuit knot that's tied at the back and presses her breasts against her swimsuit as she lies face-down on the beach mat.

"I-I'm ready. Please rub, okay?"

"O-Okay..."

The swimsuit that was undone is now stuck between the beach mat and the body, as Cecilia's completely defenseless back is naked for show to me. The cleavage that's revealed under the armpit is distorted, and it's a little--no, extremely sexy.

Also, maybe it's because she's pressing down, as her curvy buttocks aren't making me forget about them, and because the sari was blocking just now, I didn't notice that the lower part of her swimsuit revealed quite a lot.

The straight legs are as pretty as ever, making me swallow my saliva unconsciously.

"The-Then, I'm applying it now."

"KYAH! I-Ichika-san, you must warm your hands slightly before applying sunblock."

"Is-Is that so? It's my first time doing this...sorry."

"Is-Is that so? So it's your first time? It, it's not your fault then."

For some reason, I feel that Cecilia sounded really happy. Maybe I'm thinking too much.

Anyway, I followed what she instructed and squeezed the sunblock on my palms, rubbed them warm until it got suitably warm before applying it on Cecilia.

(Uwa, Cecilia's skin is really supple...I can feel that it's comfortable just by touching it...)

"Mn...that's nice! Ichika-san, do the bottom part as well ."

"I-I just needed to rub the back, no?"

"No, no...since you already started rubbing it on me, please rub onto the parts my hands can't reach, including the legs, and the butt."

"WHAAAT!?"

No-No way! This is way too dangerous. It's just applying sunblock, but for me to touch Cecilia's butt is too--

"Okay okay, I'll rub it for you, until you're all sticky."

"KYAH! Ri-Rin-san, why did you come here to me-- IT-IT'S COLD!!"

"What's the problem? Since you just need to apply sunblock, it's doesn't matter how you do it. I'll rub it on you."

"Ahh, that's enough! Behave your--"

Cecilia stood up angrily, and the swimsuit slipped down the body--

"AH!"

"KYAH!!"

That was close! The important parts weren't shown, but Cecilia ducked down, so embarrassed that her ears are red.

"Ah...sorry."

"It-It-It's basically, saying sorry now, that's...RIN-SAN! I DEFINITELY WON'T FORGIVE YOU!!"

"Hmm...I'm running off then. Bye bye!"

*Guieee*.

"HEY! STOP DRAGGING ME IN! SIGH, REALLY, YOU...SORRY CECILIA! THAT, WELL, I DIDN'T SEE THEM, SO DON'T MIND, OKAY?"

"WHA-WHAT...!"

Her face flushed red, Cecilia's unable to grip her fist tight and swing over as she maintains that pose, frozen there.

As for me, I got dragged by Rin into the sea.

"BUHA! Rin, you're really...!"

"Let's have a race to that buoy over there, Ichika! If you lose, you have to treat me to parfait at '@ CRUISE'-- READY, GO!"

"HEY, THAT'S NOT FAIR! ACK, WAIT FOR ME!!"

"HAHAHA, WHO ASKED YOU TO DAZE OFF THERE!!"

Just like that, I got dragged into the scenario of chasing after Rin. On a side note, the cheapest parfait '@ CRUISE' sells is 1,500 yen, so I definitely can't lose this match.

(I'm really sorry, Cecilia, but let me win this time.)

Rin continued to swim against Ichika as she pondered.

Last month, she specially made her sweet and sour pork bento. To be honest, it was a failure because she didn't expect Houki and Cecilia to make their own food.

(I thought that was a good strategy!)

On a side note, what she had planned for that time was:

"Only Ichika's sweet and sour pork wasn't hot."

↓

"I want to eat some hot sweet and sour pork!"

↓

"Really, what's with you."

↓

"Here, ahh--"

Something like that, but it wasn't successful at all.

It's true that the tactic to make him eat sweet and sour pork succeeded, but the fact was that she fell behind Houki, so there was a little sense of failure there.

In addition, she only bought her own share of rice because:

"Give me some rice!"

↓

"Really, it can't be helped."

↓

"Here, ah--"

She wanted to employ this tactic, but it failed because of Houki as well.

(But to guys, skin contact should be most effective, right? And Ichika knows that I'll stick onto him once I put on a swimsuit.)

But there's another problem to this reaction, and that is 'He doesn't really sees me as a girl'. To be honest, she's rather frustrated as well.

(No, no worries! There shouldn't be that many girls who would stick close to him! As for Cecilia, well, it was a close shave...)

Thinking up till here, she remembered the situation just now.

(Sunblock lotion...Ichika looked rather stiff just now. Maybe I should just get him to apply it on me.)

It was Cecilia's idea, but the winner is whoever does it first.

(Bu-But, he'll touch my body. It, it doesn't matter if I touch him, but if he's to touch me...it's-it's a little embarrassing...)

She cools her gradually reddening face into the sea, but the fluttering in her chest doesn't stop as it becomes even faster.

(Uu~...but other girls would definitely have confessed to him...)

*Bukubukubuku*, Rin's not exhaling, but sighing to hide her embarrassment. The air form bubbles in the sea.

(Huuh, Huang Lingyin, buck up! You're already studying in IS Academy, what do you intend to do if you don't work harder!?)

*Watch me!* Trying to motivate herself, she accidentally took in a large amount of air. But this is the sea, so what she breathed in wasn't air, but seawater.

"!? GLUPPLUPLUP!!"

As it was too sudden, Rin sank into a light moment of panic and started struggling due to the sudden loss of balance.

(Wa-Water, ran in...! Up, got to go up...)

But as this was the water, she didn't know which direction she was swimming towards. As Rin looked like she was really about to drown, a strong arm pulled her up.

(Ah! Ichika...this is Ichika's arm...)

A sense of relief spread through her chest. Rin hugged onto the strong arm and floated up to the surface.

"Hey, Rin! Are you alright?"

"GUHA! Ha ha! I-I'm alright..."

"Really, didn't I tell you? It's because you didn't do your warm-ups properly."

"Tha-That's not it. I nearly drowned because, because of you..."

"? Never mind, let's get back to land. Here!"

I didn't hear the last part clearly, but it's better to get back. Thinking about this, I turned my back on Rin.

"Wha-What are you going to do?"

"Get on. I'll carry you back."

"I-I'm alright. We're just heading back to the beach after all."

Even though she said this, I can't just leave someone who nearly drowned right now alone, so I deepened my tone to indicate to her that I must carry her no matter what.

*"Rin."*

"O-Okay! I got it..."

Now Rin is finally obedient enough. I carried Rin, who became rather light in the sea, and swam back to the coast.

Chifuyu-nee once taught me how to carry someone while swimming. If I don't carry the person a little higher than what I expect, the person on the back can drown, so this will require a little skill.

"Pat my back if water enters your mouth. You'll choke if you start to talk."

"Mn."

I hear her respond with her mouth shut as I swim to the coast. As it will be too dangerous to swim too fast, I started wading slowly.

"Well, about that, Ichika..."

"You'll drink seawater once you talk."

"No, that's alright. Forget about that, well..."

The voice was soft, but the last few words entered my ears clearly.

"Tha-Thank you..."

The boast she made about not drowning still remains in my ears, so now she's probably embarrassed about it. I nodded my head in response and continued to carry Rin up the coast.

"It-It's okay. I can walk on my own now."

"Really?"

"Really! That's enough, hurry up and let me down!"

Noticing me get onto the coast, the girls quickly turned around. Rin most likely felt embarrassed about being seen by those people, so she was struggling quite stubbornly.

"I got it, I'll let you down, so stop moving wildly. Even if you were a cat in your previous life, what'll happen if you fall?"

"I-I was a mermaid in my previous life..."

Nodding away, I bent my body down and let Rin off.

"I-I'll go over there to rest..."

After saying that, Rin quickly ran to the annex. Having been carried back, she was really embarrassed as her face blushed slightly.

(Mn...maybe she's embarrassed because she boasted that she wouldn't drown, is it?)

"Ah, Ichika, you're here!"

Having my name called up, I turn around to see Charl and--

"Huh? Who's this towel mummy?"

There's a super mysterious thing--it's covered completely in quite a few towels, from the head to the knees...what-what is this thing...

"Alright, come out now. It's alright."

"I-I'll decide whether it's alright..."

Hm? This voice...Laura?

But why is it that the proud Laura sounded so cowardly? And Charl's trying to convince her. Hm, I don't know what's going on.

"O~kay, it's rare for you to wear a swimsuit. Let Ichika see it!"

"Ho-Hold on, I need a bit of mental preparation as well ..."

"Well-, you've been saying that for a while, and you still haven't come out. And since I helped out, he should have the right to see it as well, right?"

Speaking of which, Charl and Laura seem to be staying in the same room. Both of them were enemies who fought intensely in the incident last month, but now it seems that they're ordinary roommates with quite the good relationship. Uu, Laura's still as unfriendly as ever. Maybe she would change if she's with someone intimate like Charl, I guess.

"Okay, Laura, if you don't want to show yourself, I'm going to play with Ichika and ignore you."

"Wha-What?"

"Yeah, let's do it. Let's go Ichika."

After that, Charl grabbed my hand, and then leaned on my shoulder as she dragged me to the sea.

"Wa-Wait for me! I-I'll go!"

"Like that?"

"Humph--I'll take it off! I'll take it off!"

*Papapa!* Several pieces of towel dropped down in an instant. Under the sun, Laura's dressed in a swimsuit. And as for that swimsuit--

う～…

The black swimsuit is decorated with a large number of laces. On first glance, it looks like a sexy lingerie. Her hair that's usually not dolled up is now tied into ponytails on left and right side. Though it looks like she's imitating Rin's get up, in truth, Laura looks--really cute. Seeing her really insecure added that cuteness factor.

"It's not weird at all! Right, Ichika?"

"Oh, yeah! I was surprised, but this really suits you."

"WHA...!"

Did I say something unexpected? Laura seem to be taken aback by that as she paused for a while, her face all blushed.

"That-That's enough for courtesies..."

"No, I'm not just saying that at all. Right Charl?"

"Yup, I told her that she was cute, and yet she didn't believe me at all. By the way I helped design Laura's hairstyle! It's rare for her to wear a swimsuit, so she should of course look a little trendier."

"Oh. So that's how it is. Yeah, your swimsuit suits you well too, Charl."

"Uu, yeah! Thanks."

After I praised her, Charl fiddled with her hair looking embarrassed. The bracelet I bought for her yesterday as a gift was still glittering on her wrist.

"Won't that rust? Is it alright?"

"It's alright. I carefully did all sorts of anti-rust measures before coming here. After that, I'll use salt water to wash it. It's a rare thing that Ichika would give me something~"

Charl chuckled. It seems that she really likes it.

"Ichika."

"Hm?"

In a completely different voice from before, Laura's voice regained her usual calm.

"That's too despicable! You didn't buy a gift for me... well, I hope that you buy me one..."

Uu, after Cecilia did that, even Laura requested for one .

"Well, if that's the case, I'll get you one if you have some day worth celebrating, like a birthday or something ."

"Uu, I see. Then you must give me one if there's a chance! Promise!"

"Okay, but the price can't be too high. I'm still a student after all."

"Uu, but one day, you have to give me a gift worth three months' salary! I heard my squad mates say that in Japan, important gifts need to be worth that much money ."

Huh--, it seems that the people making Laura mistaken about Japan are her comrades. Though it's not really wrong, it does feel that way.

"By the way, do you have anything you want? It doesn't seem like you really wear anything decorative."

"You're right. To be honest, I don't really have any interest in those sort of things...bu-but, if you choose one for me, I'll be really happy no matter what it was."

"I see. Hmm, what should I get for you? A necklace... ah, your hairstyle now will reveal your ears. Earrings are suitable for you as well. I think it would be very cute."

"Cu-Cute...?"

The different hairstyle must have made Laura uneasy, right? She looks embarrassed because I said that as she intertwined her fingers.

"ORI-MU-RA-KUN!"

"WE JUST AGREED TO PLAY BEACH VOLLEYBALL !"

"WA- AGAINST ORIMU~ THAT'S GREAT!"

It's the girl I just agreed to play with and her friends, and that Nohohon-san. For some reason, I feel that I should start remembering other people's names...

"Heh! Here, Orimura-kun!"

*Pa!* The beach volleyball flew to me. After receiving the ball, I confirmed the members beside me.

"Then, after adding Charl and Laura, it'll be 3 on 3. OK , let's start!"

After hearing my reply, the two girls quickly began to expand the net, and the Nohohon-san is drawing the boundary on the beach. Uwah, she's super slow.

"Then, we'll use the basic rules, okay? Maximum of 3 hits, no consecutive spikes, first to 10 gets the set!"

"Alright, you people can serve first."

I threw the ball over. The receiving girl's (Huh--should be Kushinada-san) eyes glowed.

"Hohoho, let me show you the Summer Devil of July's. ..ability!"

UGH! She jumped for the serve! I can't complain about the speed or the angle.

"Watch me!"

Charl said that. As expected of the reliable honor student. I'll leave it to her then.

"Huh! WAH!!"

With a 'thonk', Charl cried out. I turn around and see that Charl chased after the ball and knocked into Laura, who was standing there blankly.

"Are-Are you alright?"

"Oww...what's with you, Laura?"

"Cu-Cute...sa-said, that...I...UU!!"

For some reason, Laura blushed after seeing my face, and then ran off like a scared rabbit.

"Huh...HEY! LAURA! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?"

Even though I called her, Laura ran off into the annex and disappeared, leaving me, Charl and the three dumbfounded girls.

"Uu~hm, so it's that~ Orimu's girl electrobarrier activated~"

The Nohohon-san said. On a side note, she's not wearing a swimsuit, but a fox costume that covers her entire body, with even the ears to boot. Maybe this taste would go along with Tabane-san as well?

"Uu...yeah, never mind. We'll play on. I'll check on Laura later."

"I agree~"

Though it became 2 on 3 now, that Nohohon-san's clothes seem to have a negative effect, so we continued to play 2 on 2.

"TAKE THIS!"

Moving lightly, Charl jumped up to spike the ball. I looked up at her from the side, and those breasts that bounced crazily when she jumped stunned me.

(Uu, no...speaking of which, Charl has quite the nice body--AH, NONONONONONONONO!!!)

Realizing this, my attention was diverted, and when the opposing girls jumped up, their soft breasts would jiggle as well.

"..."

"What's wrong, Ichika?"

"No, nothing! Nothing at all! Yup, nothing!"

As soon as I thought that she realized that I was looking at the girls' bodies all the while, my heartbeat went super fast. Trying to prevent other people from realizing my inner wavering, I tried my best to deny it, by using my hands to wave them in an exaggerated manner.

Seeing my reaction, Charl gave out a weird laugh.

"I see, Ichika's really weird."

"Huh...it's summer, so I got a little too hot."

"Okay okay. You need more thermal energy in the summer, I know that."

Alriight. Recently, it seems that Charl's been very strict with my jokes. This 'I know what Ichika wants to say' attitude feels like I got caught by the neighbor nee-san, it doesn't feel good at all, or even embarrassing, I would say.

"Ah, it's about time for lunch, right? What do you want to do later, Ichika?"

"Huh-, I want to swim a little, but I can't go swimming immediately after eating a full meal. I want to rest before swimming again."

"I see. Then let's go for lunch then. Also, Ichika, which room are you staying in?"

"Ah--I want to know too!"

"Me too, me too!"

"I want to know too~useless bedtop information should be shared~"

That Nohohon-san's words made everyone look awkward. Anyway, let's ignore her for now.

"Huh-Orimura-sensei's room."

The excited looks of the girls up till now seemed to be frozen. It's like they stopped thinking due to the unexpected development.

"So it's dangerous to look for me."

"Ye-Yeah...but we can meet Orimura-kun during lunch ."

"Yeah! We don't have to enter the devil's lair--"

"Who's the devil?"

*DONG!* I seem to hear someone. No, it couldn't be my imagination. A group of girls' necks are trembling... trembling non-stop.

"O-Ori-Orimura-sensei..."

"Yup."

Ah! The swimsuit she's wearing is the black one different in style from Laura. That trained figure's being shown under the sun without any selfishness.

To be honest, if Chifuyu-nee and I weren't brother and sister, my heart would pound even crazier as well.

Even though the hands on her waist aren't different from usual, there's a slight sense of sexiness the way I see it now. Not to mention she's got good looks like a model. Compared to the other girls, she has an overwhelming victory over them.

Though Chifuyu-nee would normally wear a suit, which makes it hard to imagine, if I don't look at this from a distorted point of view, the curves revealing those breasts are really ample.

And this swimsuit emphasizes a lot on the bustline, so naturally, my eyes are attracted by that.

"...Ichika's drool is about to flow out."

"WHA...!? CHAR-CHARL!? WHAT ARE YOU SAYING!? AHAHAHA..."

"You were enticed by it."

Kuu! Well...I can't deny that.

"Alright, hurry up and go have lunch!"

"What about you, sensei?"

"I'm going to enjoy this really pitifully little free time."

Just as she said, the teachers don't seem like they have much free time. If that's the case, I don't want to delay her much.

"We'll go have lunch then."

"Follow the gathering time. Don't be late."

"Yes."

I just said that and left the location. As it's just past 12, other students beside us are moving off as well.

"Did you see Orimura-sensei's swimsuit? So pretty~ cool~"

"Ah~ I want to become like that as well."

"I don't think you have any hope."

"How would you know if you don't try?"

The students were debating furiously. I'm rather uncomfortable about hearing my relative get praised. I don't know if I should be happy or embarrassed.

(But speaking of which, it really suits her...)

Truthfully, Chifuyu-nee's beautiful like a model--no, better than a model.

"Ichika, is Orimura-sensei your type?"

"HUH? WHA-WHAT? CHARL, WHAT'S WITH THAT ALL OF A SUDDEN..."

"Nothing, it's just that I find that your reaction on seeing our swimsuits was somewhat different."

Wah, Charl-san's not happy...I guess. Why?

"Sigh, there're so many enemies...and they're all so strong. It'll be even tougher with Orimura-sensei in the mix."

That's true. Chifuyu-nee's strong. Last month, she even used her IS sword[3B 3]. How much power and skill are required to get to that level...

"She's amazing, that Orimura-sensei."

"...I get the feeling that Ichika's missing the point here."

"Huh? Really?"

"That's right. Sigh...the strongest enemy is still Ichika."

Uu, really? But if possible, I really don't want to fight against Charl. As we teamed up before, I feel that she'd toy with me.

"Oh well, it's pointless to think too much. Let's go Ichika."

"Oh, okay."

I don't know what's going on, but as I head off to the annex to change, my hand got grabbed by Charl, who seems to be feeling better. I intend to swim later, but I don't think anyone would wear a swimsuit for lunch, right?

"What's for lunch? Maybe we might get sashimi[3B 4]."

"Sashimi! That's great! I like sashimi the most."

On a side note, this is an example of how used Charl is to Japanese culture. If it's Cecilia, she would say, 'Eating fish, raw? Tha-That's unbelievable...'. As for Laura, she would say 'Relax, I've gone through raw food eating training to survive in the jungle when I'm alone'. Um, Laura, it's not like that.

(Speaking of which...)

Suddenly, I remembered that Houki disappeared.

(She's not in the sea? She should be good at swimming, so why?)

Thinking about this, I waved goodbye to Charl and the rest as I walked into the guys' changing room.

Time passed, and it's now 7:30pm. We're having our dinner in the large banquet hall that's composed of 3 halls linked together.

"Yeah, it's great! The sashimi provided for lunch and dinner here is fantastic!"

"That's right. IS Academy's really too powerful."

Sitting beside me, Charl said as she nodded away.

Right now, she's dressed in a yukuta like everyone here. I'm not really sure, but the rule within this resort seems to be that 'One has to wear yukatas while eating'. Normally speaking, aren't they not allowed...?

The 1st years that are sitting neatly in rows are sitting on cushions. So of course, we're all sitting down in the seiza position[3B 5]. Everyone has a catering table in front of them.

The dishes are sashimi and a small hotpot. There's a salad of 2 mountain herbs, red miso soup and pickled vegetables.

That's good enough, but the sashimi's actually made from a Thread-sail filefish[3B 6], and there's even fish liver to go with it. Really unbelievable.

I bit into the fish. The feeling's really unique, and there's no fishiness to it. It's really delicious, yet so hard to describe. There's no stench or bitterness in the fish liver, and the taste is thick. I can understand now why it recently became a high class fish on the market.

"Ahh, it's so delicious! And this wasabi[3B 7] is real! Amazing! Hey, this isn't something a high school student can eat!"

"A real wasabi?"

"Hm? Charl, you don't know? The wasabi sauce that's grounded direcly through a wasabi root is a real wasabi."

"Huh? Then the ones given with the sashimi at the school cafeteria is..."

"That's manufactured. Well, the main ingredients are the wasabi root and horseradish. After coloring and mixing them, it will look and tastes like wasabi."

"Oh~so this is a real one?"

"Yup. But there's a lot of nice manufactured wasabi. Based on the way the manfacturer does it, some shops would even mix real wasabi with manufactured wasabi sauce."

"I see. Uu..."

Huh? Did Charl just swallow the entire pile of wasabi in...?

"U~.....!!!"

As I expected, Charl pressed her nose as tears swelled up in her eyes. What the heck...

"Are you alright?"

"U-Um allbite..."[3B 8]

Charl forced her words out with her nose as she tried to force a smile. However, the smile wasn't too successful because of the tears in her eyes.

"It-It's flavorful. Not bad...ni...ce."

That's forcing it too much, isn't it?

"...Uu..."

On a side note, ever since the beginning, Cecilia, who's sitting on my left has been moaning like this. She doesn't seem to be used to sitting in a seiza position, and she hasn't eaten much.

"Are you alright, Cecilia? You don't look so good."

"I...am...okay..."

Nope, seems like she's not. Speaking of which, she's really not used to sitting in a seiza position...

Cecilia, who's trembling non-stop, seem to be forcing all her strength as a show of pride as she acts like nothing's wrong while picking up her chopsticks.

"Thanks...for the...food..."

It seems like she's even having trouble drinking the miso soup.

Speaking of which, the students from IS Academy are from all over the world. Thus, there are students and teachers from all countries.

The scenery in front of me is as such; blonds in yukata, silver-haired girls, brown-skinned students, blue-eyed students...a whole assortment of races. It seems that this is the only place where one can feel that I just went around the whole world. Of course, that's impossible.

"Ni-Nice..."

She-She's smiling...

Hmm, seems like she's really forcing it...

"Cecilia, if you can't sit down, shouldn't you move over to the dinner tables over there? A lot of our classmates are there. You don't have to be embarrassed about it, you know?"

By the way, having considered the many nationalities, race and religions of the students, the school provided an eating area for the students who can't eat in a seiza position.

As the meal trays are sorted according to the type of cuisine, so those who want their own food just need to take their own and consume it.

"I'm-I'm alright...compared to the effort I spent just to get this seat, this trivial thing..."

Hm? Get a seat? What did she mean? I thought the dinner seating was just according to first-come-first-serve , isn't that the case?

"Ichika, girls consider about a lot of things."

"Really?"

"Yeah."

That seems to be the case.

(Speaking of which, where did Houki go?)

Ah, she saw me. She's just sitting at the rear behind the rows opposite me. As expected of a girl from the kendo dojo, Houki's back is straight and proper as she eats her meal.

She seem to be talking about something interesting with the student beside her as she doesn't notice the look I gave her.

Should I say that it's to be expected of Houki? Even the way she's dressed in a yukata is stunning. Is the typical ' Yamato Nadeshiko'[3B 9] referring to someone like her?

"Ah, Orimura-kun. kya~"

The girl who's beside Houki suddenly noticed me and waved her hand at me. Such an action made Houki, who looked like she was chatting away happily, glare at me unhappily.

That expression most likely means 'Why are you showing such an indecent smile to a girl? You rude guy'.

I casually just waved my hand back at them in response and again focused on eating my dinner. Maybe they can't eat on if I continue to stare at them?

(Speaking of which, where did Tabane-san go...)

She just suddenly disappeared after that daring and unruly entrance. I really don't understand her.

"U, ugh...erm..."

Right, Cecilia is still having trouble sitting in the seiza position. She has already failed to pick up the sashimi twice.

"Cecilia."

"I'm not going there."

Uu, I got refuted back.

"But you can't eat anything like this, right? Do I need to feed you like what I did to Cha--"

"I-Ichika!"

"--Sorry."

I nearly slipped it out. To Charl, it should be embarrassing that she couldn't use chopsticks and needed someone to feed her, right?

I covered my mouth and apologized to her.

"I-Ichika-san, was what you said true!?"

WA--I got noticed! No wait, got to give an excuse somewhat.

"Huh--at that time, Charl wasn't feeling..."

"FORGET ABOUT CHARLOTTE-SAN! YOU-YOU SAID...YOU-YOU'D FEED ME...!"

"Uu, well? Alright then? You'll be able to enjoy dinner now that your legs aren't numb. And the fish is a thread-sail filefish. Wouldn't it be a waste not to finish?"

"Th-That's right! Mn, mnn! It'll be rude to the chefs if we waste such a delicious thing!"

Yeah, that's right. We can't just treat the food the chefs prepared for us as nothing. Anyone who can't appreciate that should end up dead.

"I-I'll leave it to you then."

Cecilia said as she passed me the chopsticks. Once I received the chopsticks, I immediately picked up a piece of sashimi.

"Do you dare to eat wasabi, Cecilia?"

"Wa-Wasabi, well, well, maybe later..."

Seems like she doesn't. Wasabi's nice.

"Here."

"Ok, okay. Ah--"

The moment she was about to eat it down, trouble happened.

"AHHH!! YOU'RE TOO SNEAKY, CECILIA!! WHAT ARE YOU DOING!!?"

"YOU ACTUALLY LET ORIMURA-KUN FEED YOU!! YOU'RE DESPICABLE!!"

"CRAFTY! SINISTER! BLACK-HEARTED!!"

Uwah, the other girls found out. But isn't that to be expected? Everyone's lined up while eating, so obviously , any ordinary person would find out.

"That, that's not crafty! That's the privilege of sitting beside him!"

"THAT'S CALLED BEING SINISTER!!"

"ORIMURA-KUN, I WANT IT TOO!!!"

Is this an honor? A group of girls wanting me to feed them started rushing over. Hey! Hold on! You people all look like you can eat normally!

"HURRY UP HURRY UP!!"

"AHM--MMN!!"

A group of girls opened their mouths at the same time. Whaat, are you all nestlings!!?

"Why can't all of you eat your meals quietly?"

After hearing that voice, everyone froze.

"O-Orimura-sensei..."

"Seems like all of you are rather energetic, right? Very good...well, 50km should be alright, so go run a round on the beach and come back, is that alright?"

"NONONO! PLEASE DON'T SAY THAT!! WE'LL EAT OBEDIENTLY!"

After saying that, everyone immediately returned to their seats. Upon seeing this, Chifuyu-nee stared at me and said,

"Orimura, stop creating commotions. It'll be troublesome to control them."

"I-I got it."

It's...It's my fault? Really?

"That's how it is, Cecilia. Sorry, please..."

"..."

Uu, she really looks unhappy. If there's a special effect sound to describe it, it should be like 'hmm~', right?

"Well. Umm..."

"I got it, alright? I got it! Ichika-san values his sister the most."

Hm...seems like I really made her angry--oh, that's right.

"To make up for it, Cecilia, come over to my room."

After I said that softly, Cecilia blinked.

"Later to your room...? That means--"

*Pa!* She suddenly grabbed my hand and answered softly yet enthusiatically,

"Okay, I got it! I-I need to prepare, so you may need to wait a while, but I'll definitely be there!"

Prepare? Prepare what? While I was still thinking about this, Cecilia already changed her mood as she wolfed down her meal. Seems like she got used to the numbness. That's good.

"Ahh, it's nice no matter what I eat!"

She's-She's really enthusiastic! But she's right. Each meal is delicious, so I can understand her feelings.

(What's the base used for this small hotpot? Ginger, wasabi...un.)

Even though the soup base is refreshing and not oily, there's quite the flavor in it. As it's really tasty, I really like it. It seems that my preference is towards these home-styled type.

After that, I continued to analyze the individual ingredients. By the time I realized them all, my stomach was full.

"Hoo~that was good."

An onsen bath after a meal is truly a luxury.

After bathing alone in this open-aired onsen where I could see everything, I went back to my room in high spirits.

(Chifuyu-nee went to bathe too?)

Seems like she's not in the room either. I thought--well, she just happened to come back.

"Huh? You're alone? You didn't bring a girl with you? How uninteresting."

"I say, you...umm, never mind. Forget about it."

This room is still the 'Orimura-sensei' room. Once someone does something suspicious, it's unknown what fate will befall them.

Incidentally, Chifuyu-nee did take a bath since her hair's all wet. Even though she's my sister, the overly glamorous black hair made my heart race.

"Hey, Chifuyu-nee."

She glares at me, sharply.

"Call me Orimura-sensei."

"What's the problem. There's only the two of us left, and we just bathed, and we haven't done it for a long time--"

"-♪"

Having taken a bath after the meal, Cecilia, who had bathed again, was happily changing clothes.

She was wearing the yukata the resort provided, but the underwear under it was completely different.

(Ahh, just in case...the underwear I brought just in case can finally be used!)

Thinking till here, her expression became exceptionally gentle.

Seeing that mysterious yet excited look on her, a certain classmate asked incredulously,

"Did something good happen, Cecilia?"

"Nope, nothing♪"

"...That expression says otherwise, you know?"

"Oh my, really? Ufufu."

"Sigh...never mind. Ahh, it's rare to have a chance to prepare so much just to play with Orimura-kun, and yet he and Orimura-sensei are in the same room..."

We can't possibly play now...the other girls nodded in unison.

Incidentally, they had prepared games with poker cards, UNO cards, Hanafuda, the Game of Life and Twister so guys and girl could look forward to. It's amazing that even in the 21st century these games are still extremely popular.

(Ufufu, I don't need to play games at all tonight.)

Cecilia hummed as she blowed-dryed her hair. Her wavering strands were two times more glamorous than usual.

"Ah~your underwear is so sexy. It's so revealing--"

Even though her eyes were half-open, the Nohohon-san's observation and perception skills were extremely great. On hearing her say that, even Cecilia felt a shock deep inside, because...

"WHAT? SOMEBODY HELP STRIP HER~!"

"STRIP~STRIP HER OFF~!!"

"KYAH! ST-STOP IT...STOP PULLING~!"

If three people gathered together can perform a skit, then with nine people you could perform three skits. Especially since everyone couldn't go and find their target, Ichika, to play with, they ended up having a lot of free time. Seeing the girls go crazy like this Cecilia could sense how energetic they really were.

"WAH!! THAT'S SOME EROTIC UNDERWEAR..."

"ERO~ ERO~"

"What's this? Lucky underwear? We're unable to go to Orimura-kun's room, and you're wearing such a thing!?"

The girls started chatting away, and finally declare in unison,

""""CECILIA'S SO LEWD!!!""""

"I'm-I'm not~! This, this is, just preparations for the occasion...yes, for the occasion!"

Cecilia pulled on her now ruffled yukata and argued back while blushing, praying silently to herself that the fact that she would be going to Ichika's room alone won't be revealed.

"Speaking of which, you were pretty thorough in your bathing."

Uh oh.

"And after bathing, you put on make-up for some reason."

Uh oh uh oh.

"That's rather suspicious, you know?"

"That's-that's not suspicious! Girls should be aware of the occasion! I still have things to do. Got to make a move first!"

After saying some mood-killing words, Cecilia stood up. *I'll win once I step out of this room!* Just when she thought that...

"Un? Hmm? This isn't the perfume Cecilia normally uses. This fragrance is L'Ireal[3B 10] Number 6? Wa~ that's pretty high class~"

After the Nohohon-san said that, the girls' expression froze.

--Oh no! It was too late, the moment Cecilia thought this, the girls began to hassle her and ask.

"L'Ireal number 6? I heard that one bottle costs about 100,000 yen?"

"They only produce 100 bottles of it every year, and there's even a serial number!"

"Do you have the product with you? Show me!"

"O-Okay, it's alright to show you. Anyway, I'll go off first--"

""""NO WAY!!!""""

Ehh~ Cecilia muttered deep inside, but the girls grabbed her hand really tightly, making her to be unable to get away.

"Where did you buy this? Didn't I hear that it's hard to buy even with money?"

"Our family has relations with the L'Ireal company..."

"UWA! ISN'T CECILIA SUPER RICH!?"

"LET ME HAVE A WHIFF!"

"Ah, erm, if you like it, you can use it however you want. As for me, I'll leave first..."

""""NO WAY!!!""""

Ehhh~...the same desciption follows.

"THAT'S A WASTE!"

"IF CECILIA APPLIED IT, WE WILL JUST SMELL YOUR BODY! OKAY?"

"KAGU~KAGU!"

The girls immediately opened their arms wide and rushed over. Cecilia had a bad feeling as she continued to back away until she hit the wall.

"Fufufu, we're not letting you get away."

"Alright, just surrender quietly!"

"Very good~ very good~"

The girls slowly closed in with their eyes shining mysteriously.

"No, no, NOOOOOOOOOO~!!!"

"Uu, uu...that was too much..."

Having been harrassed badly by the other girls, Cecilia looked thoroughly worn out as she walks on the corridor .

(But at last, I can finally--!!)

*Go to Ichika's room!!* Thinking about this, all the damage and fatigue she suffered up till now disappeared in a puff of smoke, and the ruffled yukata recovered in just a few seconds.

(I-I need to adjust my voice too. Mn, mnn.)

Her excitement caused her to walk like the breeze, moving faster like she was dancing as she moved towards her destination.

However--

"..."

"..."

She saw two girls in front of Ichika's room door.

"Rin-san? Houki-san? What are you two--"

"Shh!"

With Rin hushing her, Cecilia immediately quieted down.

Not understanding what was going on, she suddenly heard voices from behind the door.

"Chifuyu-nee, you're a bit tense because you haven't done it for a long time?"

"How is it possible, idiot--mm! A-A little forceful..."

"Yes yes, how about...there?"

"Ah! Th-There, there's...no good, UU!"

"You'll be comfortable soon. There's quite a bit of fatigue you accumulated..."

"AHHH!!"

...

"Wh-Wha-What's going on...?"

Her mouth trembling, Cecilia forced a smile as she asked. However, she only got the silent response of the other two.

"..."

"..."

Rin and Houki looked dead serious like they hadn't slept for the entire night.

"Then--"

"Hold on, Ichika."

Their conversation was interrupted. Just as the three people with their ears at the door felt that it was weird--

*PAM!!*

"""HUKK!!!"""

The door got punched without warning.

The moment the door got hit, the three teenage girls shouted out in reflex.

"What are you idiots doing?"

"Ha, haha..."

"Good evening, Orimura-sensei..."

"Bye...bye bye, Orimura-sensei!!"

The trio intended to escape like rabbits, but got caught immediately. Rin and Houki got caught by the collars, and Cecilia got stepped on the yukata. They didn't think they could win in a battle of brawns other than in IS battles.

"I can't allow eavesdropping. But since you're here, come in."

""""WHAAT!!???""""

The unexpected words caused the trio to widen their eyes in shock.

"Ahhh, yes, the other two--call Bodewig and Dunois here."

"Ye-Yes!"

The moment the back of their collars got released, Rin and Houki immediately ran off to call them.

With the hem of her yukata removed, Cecilia adjusted it and walks into the room.

"Ohh, you're really slow, Cecilia. Let's get it started."

Ichika slapped the bed, indicating to Cecilia to get on.

In contrast, Cecilia was blushing in embarrassment due to such a bold request.

"Huh, ahh, isn't Orimura-sensei still here? This..."

"What's wrong? I'm warmed up already. Let's get started."

"No, not that, but, this, is, the mood..."

"...?"

Ichika still didn't understand what Cecilia was trying to talk about as he looked puzzled. He then patted the bedsheet again to prompt her to be faster.

Feeling really bothered, Cecilia secretly glanced at Chifuyu, who remained silent and gave a 'Don't mind me , just start' look.

(How, how can I not be bothered by this...)

However, she couldn't decide. But, since Chifuyu seemed to have called for Charlotte and Laura to come over as well, things would only get worse if she dragged this on.

(UU...! WO-WOMEN MUST BE FORCEFUL!!)

After screaming this in her heart, Cecilia gave up as she laid on the bedsheet.

Her crazily-beating heart sounded like it could explode any second soon. Cecilia's heart was full of anticipation and anxiety as she closed her eyes.

"..."

But nothing happened.

Ahh...? Just when she felt that this was weird and opened her right eye slightly, Ichika said.

"Cecilia, if you don't lie down, I can't do that."

"Huh? Huh? Do-Do it...lying down?"

"Yup."

"I-I see..."

Even though Cecilia felt bothered that it was different from what she read on the books, she still convinced herself that this was a normal thing in Japan.

"I'm starting then!"

"O-Okay!"

The sudden break in voice caused her to be embarrassed and anxious. Cecilia's heart started to beat crazily until she felt that it was about to pounce out as she waited for the incoming hand. Then--

"Mn, shoo..."

KYU~!!!

"OWWWW...IT HURTS! I-I-ICHIKA-SAN! WHA-WHAT ARE YOU DOING--AUUU!!!"

"What am I doing? A massage."

"Mas...sage...?"

"Yup? At the waist."

"Waist..."

Cecilia looked stunned as she repeated what Ichika said like a parrot.

"E-Erm, Ichika-san, did you invite me to your room for this..."

"Yup. I just wanted to give you a massage. You're living in a large room right, Cecilia? I can't focus if that was the case, so I called you here."

...

KAU~ It felt like a crow flew by from above as Cecilia started crying inside her heart.

"That-That was bad...I..."

"Hm? Wha-What is it? Is it that painful?"

"Yeah, it hurts...it hurts so badly that I feel like I will die..."

"I-I'm sorry then. I'll go lighter a bit."

"Anything will do..."

Cecilia sighed deeply, deeper than the darkness, that even the souls got sighed away as she had the look of fatigue, despair, cool and self-depreciation.

But the comfort of the massage and her conversation with Ichika caused her mood to naturally improve.

"Will this force do?"

"Mn...feels great..."

*Gu*, *gu*. Ichika pressed against her back with his thumbs as he started massaging on both left and right sides.

"Speaking of which, your waist's really stiff. What do you normally do, Cecilia?"

"Mn, I do play the violin, but only occasionally. It-It feels a bit bad there..."

"Oh, sorry. I won't use my fingers then."

Ichika relaxed his thumbs and silently exerted force on his palms.

He's not using his thumbs as a pressure point, but using his palms to relax Cecilia's body with suitable force . Soon, that touch became a stable feeling, causing her to moan out in comfort.

"Haa...Ichika-san really is skillful..."

"Yeah, because I've been massaging Chifuyu-nee for a while now."

"...And to the girls..."

Though she sounded like she was grumbling, Cecilia just muttered that at a volume Ichika couldn't hear. Maybe it was because the massage made her feel good. Her voice did not carry any anger, instead bringing a cute feeling of 'Wanting fawn and wanting to make the other person feel troubled'.

"I'll push up the backbone then."

"Okay...I'll leave it to you then..."

Feeling really happy and comfortable with the massage now, Cecilia felt like sleeping as she answered in a dazed manner.

"Any place you want me to exert more strength?"

"Fufu, I'll leave it to you then..."

"Okay then. Let me check here first."

The range of massaging wasn't just limited to the top of the back as Ichika exerted force on both sides. He rub his palms and gently knocked on her. This method can remove muscle stiffness and making people feel like sleeping.

Ichika had said 'A good massage will make people want to sleep, and it will be extremely good if you immediately sleep, as the fatigue will be inexplicably removed from you'. These words were true.

Massages with only pain are basically torture and interrogation. Only when the body and soul feels relaxed completely can it be considered a complete massage. A real high quality massage can relax the body, and more importantly, the soul.

(Mn...I really...feel like sleeping...)

Cecilia thought that with the now empty mind of hers, and now that idea gradually disappeared.

Suddenly, she felt a male's scent on the bedsheet she's lying on. This is Ichika's scent, causing her heart to beat wildly again.

(Such a wonderful smell..)

Just when the half-awake Cecilia's about to fall alseep with the scent, suddenly--

*Grope!*

"!?!?"

As her arms got grabbed suddenly, Cecilia's seemingly sleeping state got woken up immediately.

(I-I-Ichika-san!? Eve-Even if it's a massage? That-That's too daring...!)

She used her right hand to press onto her wildly beating heart and turned around while trembling--

"Yo--you precocious brat."

Chifuyu grabbed onto Cecilia's butt without mercy as she revealed a playful look of one whose prank had succeeded. However, that look didn't look apologetic or innocent, but one with ill-intent.

"Wearing such underwear that really doesn't match your age. And it's black too."

"HUH...KYAAAAAHHHH!!?"

As Chifuyu grabbed Cecilia's butt from below, the round buttocks got revealed by the yukata that flipped up. Of course, the underwear on the inside got seen.

It was a laced 'special underwear' with extremely little cloth. Both sides were tied using strings, and it looked like it was designed to be taken off easily.

"..."

Feeling really embarrassed, Ichika immediately looked away. Seeing him like this, Cecilia understood clearly that 'she got exposed', and felt so embarrassed that she wanted to find a hole to hide in.

"SEN-SEN-SENSEI! PLEASE LET GO OF ME!!"

She shouted out while blushing, but unexpectedly, Chifuyu just let go like this.

"Oh my, to think that you would expect to do such an erotic thing in front of a teacher. You 15-year-old girl."

"E-ER-ERO-EROTIC...!?"

"I'm just kidding--HEY, THE 4 PEOPLE OUTSIDE, TIME TO GET IN HERE!!"

THIS IS BAD!!!

"""""""..."""""""

After a few seconds of silence, the door opened.

Standing at the door were Rin, Houki, Charlotte and Laura. They're all wearing the yukatas provided by the resort.

"You had enough of massaging, right, Ichika? Okay, you girls go get a place to sit."

Seeing Chifuyu greet them, the four girls walked into the room with a look of terror. They then followed orders and looked for their favorite seats (though there's only the bed and chairs).

"Fuu--Having massaged two people at one go, I'm sweating quite a bit now."

"That's because you don't know how to conserve your strength. You wouldn't become like that if you just skipped a few parts."

"No, I would feel sorry for the people who took their time to let me massage them."

"You're rather straightforward."

"Just praise me once in a while, okay, Chifuyu-nee?"

"Who knows?"

Hearing both of them chat away happily, everyone present finally realized what was going on. Anyway, what they just eavesdropped on Cecilia's voice and Chifuyu's voice from before were because of the massage .

"Ha, haha...haa."

"I-I-I knew about this already..."

Houki relaxed completely, yet Rin just argued back.

""..""

Having imagined all sorts of 'explicit things', Charlotte and Laura blushed as they looked down.

"Uu, go take a bath again. It won't feel good if the entire room's filled with the smell of your sweat."

"Okay, I'll do that then."

On hearing Chifuyu's words, Ichika nodded his head as he took the towel and change of clothes. He then walked out of the room, leaving behind a 'Just relax. Erm, it may be a bit too hard, right?'.

"..."

Like what Ichika said, the five girls who were ordered to sit down didn't dare to move at all.

"Hey hey, is this the watching of a funeral? What happened to that usual noisy atmosphere?"

"No, it's not that, but..."

"Talk-Talking to Orimura-sensei like this. Well, how should I say it..."

"It's the first time anyway..."

"Really, it can't be helped then. I'll treat all of you to drinks then. What do you want, Shinonono?"

Being called out suddenly, Houki's shoulders trembled as she felt bothered about being unable to answer immediately.

Just when everyone was hesitating, Chifuyu opened the fridge of the resort room and took out 5 bottles of cool refreshments.

"Here, ramune, orange juice, sports drink, coffee and red tea. If you want to drink something else, just exchange around."

Even though she said that, the girls took the respective drinks. Houki, Charlotte, Rin, Laura and Cecilia felt satisfied with their drinks, so they didn't exchange it.

"Thanks-Thanks for the patronage."

Everyone said in unison and started drinking.

Seeing the rumbling on the girls' throats, Chifuyu smiled.

"You drank it?"

"Ye-Yes?"

"We-We did..."

"Wha-What did you put inside?"

"Idiots, stop being so rude. It's nothing much, I just want to bribe you anyway."

After saying that, Chifuyu took out a canned beer with a star logo from the fridge.

With the crisp sound of the can being opened, the beer foam bubbles spurted out. Chifuyu just gulped it down in one shot.

"..."

Everyone present just looked dumbstruck as Chifuyu looked seemingly satisfied as she sat on the bedsheet.

"Well, I wanted to share a bit with Ichika...but I couldn't wait."

This person in front of them now is completely different from the lawful and ridiculously strict ' Orimura-sensei', causing the girls to be dumbstruck, especially Laura, who continued to blink her eyes like mad as if she couldn't believe what she just saw.

"Stop giving me that weird look! I'm an ordinary person, of course I would drink beer! Do I look like I drink machine oil?"

"No, no, it's not that..."

"It's not..."

"But, right now..."

"Aren't you working now..."

Laura just left her mouth wide open, unable to say anything, and then gulped down the black coffee in her hand.

"Don't be so strict! I just bribed you people anyway."

Chifuyu revealed a heinous grin as she looked around at everyone's hand. At this moment, the girls finally

realized the meaning behind the drinks as they let out an 'Ah'.

"That's it for the opening. Now to the main point."

Chifuyu wanted Laura to get her a second can of beer. With the crisp sound of the can being opened again, she continued,

"I say, what's so good about that guy?"

Even though Chifuyu said 'That guy', everyone present knew who she's referring to. The only 'him'-- Ichika.

"I-I'm not really that interested in him...it's just that I feel angry that he's no longer as strong as before."

Drinking the ramune, Houki said.

"Just a little fate..."

Rin mumbled while rubbing her sports drink can.

"As the class representative, I just want him to buck up ."

Completely different in attitude now, Cecilia boasted proudly.

"Oh, is that so? I'll just tell Ichika that then."

Chifuyu's casual words scared the trio as they all stopped her.

""""PLEASE DON'T SAY IT OUT!!!""""

Seeing them like this, Chifuyu laughed and took another gulp of beer.

"I--well, I...like his kindness, so..."

Charlotte muttered softly, yet it sounded firm.

"Oh? But he's kind to everyone."

"Tha-That's right...which is why I hate it..."

She revealed an embarrassed smile as she fanned her burning cheeks. The trio before Charlotte stared at her, seemingly feeling envious.

"What about you?"

Chifuyu asked the silent Laura. Laura jerked, probably not expecting to be called up. She said,

"May-Maybe because he's strong..."

"He's weak."

That was a merciless critique. Even though Chifuyu said that without treating it as much, Laura argued back, which was rare of her,

"He-He's strong! Stronger than me, at least."

*I see...* Chifuyu said as she finished off the second beer can in her hand.

"Well, forget about whether that guy's strong or not. That guy's pretty useful. He can do housework, he can cook, and his massages are great."

*Isn't that right, Alcott?* Being questioned, Cecilia blushed as she looked down and nodded her head gently .

"Anyway, I know the kind of girl he would like to go out with. So? Do you want to know?"

Huh? Everyone looked up. Laura asked timidly,

"Are you going to tell us?"

"Idiots, you really think I would?"

Ehhh~...the girls moaned in their hearts.

"As women how can you lack will when fighting for a guy? Work harder brats, and try to get to my level!"

Bringing the third can of beer to her mouth, Chifuyu looked delighted as she said that.

# Chapter 3: Thin Red Line - Standing on the Boundary Line

It's the second day of training camp, and today, we're going to carry out testing of all sorts of IS equipment and data collection. As for those with personal machines, they have to try out a large amount of equipment for them, so it's extremely tough.

"Is everyone here--hey, the latecomer over there."

"Ye-Yes!"

Unexpectedly, the one who cringed when Chifuyu-nee called her was Laura.

It seems she got up late, a rare feat for her, and got to the gathering point 5 minutes late.

"In that case, explain the IS Core Network."

"O-Okay! The IS core network uses all sorts of signals to exchange data. It was originally designed to send the location information in vast space. Right now, it allows the pilots to communicate with each other through public and private channels. Also, through recent researches, the core attracts all sorts of signals through a 'sharing'

method as fuel to evolve. As the creator Professor Shinonono viewed these as a part of evolution, she allowed them to develop continuously, so right now, they're still under development, resulting in an incomplete grasp of the whole picture."

"Outstanding as always. I'll let you off for being late then."

On hearing Chifuyu-nee say that, Laura heaved a sigh of relief. I don't know if it's just my imagination, but it seems that she's patting herself on the chest to comfort herself...oh well, Laura probably just felt the unspeakable terror of Chifuyu-nee when she was an instructor in Germany, I guess.

"Alright. Each class is to carry their stuff to begin the IS part testing. Those with personal suits are to test the personal parts. Everyone, move fast."

Everyone answered yes. As all the first years are lined up in a straight line, there are a lot of us. On a side note, we're on a beach for IS testing. The surroundings are extremely high cliffs, so if there's a need to go to the sea, one has to go underwater and through a water tunnel. It really looked like some underwater filming for a movie.

The IS and equipment that was to be used for testing is gathered here for this purpose.

Of course, as we have to pilot IS, all of us are wearing our IS suits. It feels like some sort of swimsuit ( competition?) at the seaside.

"Ah, Shinonono, come over here."

"Yes."

Houki, who was using the [Uchigane] to carry something, heard Chifuyu-nee call her and walks towards her.

"From today onwards, you'll be pilo--"

"CHHHHHIIIIIII~ CHHHHHHHHHAAAAAAAAAAAANNNNN ~!!!"

*Zudododododododododo...!* As a cloud of sand and dust gathered, a figure came flying over at a very fast speed. Maybe she has an IS on her? Though the problem's that person--

"...Tabane."

That's how it is. That peerless genius Shinonono Tabane just ignored the restriction of the zone completely and came barging in just like that.

"Yaa Yaa! I really missed you Chi-chan! Let's hug to show our love--fuheh!!"

Chifuyu-nee held down Tabane-san who came flying over with one hand, grabbing onto her face too as the fingers sank mercilessly into the flesh. Chifuyu-nee really doesn't know how to show mercy.

"Shut up, Tabane."

"Mmmn...your iron claw's as merciless as ever."

Actually, she's amazing for being able to clamp down Tabane-san like that.

After shouting out lightly, Tabane-san now turns to Houki.

"Yaa!"

"...Hello."

"Hehehe, long time no see. How long have we not met ? A few years? Houki-chan's really grown up, especially the breasts~"

*GANK!*

"I'll beat you up!"

"You've already beaten me up...and with a Japanese sword sheath! That's too mean! Houki-chan's soo mean~! "

Pressing her head, Tabane-san looked teary eyed as she complained. Everyone present just looked at that exchange.

"Huh, well, well, people other than the ones involved are not--"

"Hmm? What you're saying is really weird. If you're talking about IS related personnel, I'm the most most important person now."

"Huh, ah, so, yeah, so, I guess that's right..."

Yamada-sensei got shot down beautifully. Basically, there's nothing anyone can do as they just let her on a roll .

"Hey! Tabane! Introduce yourself, my students don't know what's going on."

"Huh--that's so troublesome...hello, I'm the genius Tabane-san! That's all from me!"

After saying that, she even made a spin around. At this moment, everyone present seem to finally realize that this is the genius scientist who developed the IS, and the girls started to chat.

"Haa...can't you even introduce yourself properly? Hey, first-years, why are you stopping? Ignore this person here and continue testing."

"That's too much, calling me 'this person'. Can't you call me 'my beloved Tabane'?"

"SHUT UP!!"

While both of them are exchanging words, Yamada-sensei trembles as she interrupts them.

"Huh, erm, what should I do in this situation..."

"Ah, like I just said, you can ignore this person here. Yamada-sensei, please help assist the classes."

"I-I got it."

"Uu, Chi-chan's so kind...this Tabane-san really feels envious. She got fooled by this huge-breasted monster, right~?"

After saying that, Tabane-san leaped onto Yamada-sensei as her hands quickly grabbed onto her ample breasts.

"KYAAAAHHH! WH-WHA-WHAT ARE YOU DOING?"

"Sigh, what's the problem, what's the problem~?"

Wa, the topic just changed within a few seconds... where in the world did her jealousy go to?

On a side note, Tabane-san's breasts are slightly bigger than Chifuyu-nee's and about the same size as Yamada-sensei. Actually, it's kind of an eye candy to see two huge-breasted women harrass each other.

"SHUT IT YOU IDIOT! IF WE'RE TALKING ABOUT BREASTS, AREN'T YOURS BIG ENOUGH?"

"Hehehe, Chi-chan's so lewd."

"GO TO HELL!!"

After being kicked really hard by Chifuyu-nee, Tabane-san's face got buried fully into the beach sand. Let me emphasize this again. This woman in front of us is the peerless genius who single-handedly developed the basics of IS and practical design.

"So what about the thing I requested from you...?"

Houki sounded somewhat hesitant as she asked that. On hearing that, Tabane-san's eyes lit up.

"Fufufu, I prepared that already. Here, behold the great sky!"

Tabane-san pointed up at the sky. On hearing her say that, Houki and the other students looked up at the sky.

*ZUUUNNN!*

"WAHHH!"

Suddenly, really suddenly, with the sound of an impact, an unidentified metallic object dropped onto the sand.

The silvery metal block looked like it's a wall for a moment as its front part falls down. Then we see the contents inside. What's inside is--

"Jya jyan~![3C 1] This is Houki-chan's personal IS [Akatsubaki]![3C 2] Its specs are superior to every IS in every way and was made personally by Tabane-san!"

As if in response to Tabane-san, that crimson red armor was moved out using mobile arms.

The red armor was reflecting the bright sunlight, probably because it's a new IS. It's really eye-catching. Huh? Did Tabane-san just mention something unbelievable? The specs are all superior to the current ISes. In other words, it's the newest and strongest frame!

"Here, Houki-chan, it's now time for the optimization! I'll help out from aside, so it'll end soon♪"

"...I'll leave it to you then."

"That's so rare~. We're blood siblings. You should talk to me in a more affectionate manner--"

"Hurry up and start."

Is this what they mean by 'playing alone'? Houki ignored Tabane-san completely and prompted her to move.

"Mn~ well, that's true. Let's get started then."

*Pi*-Tabane-san pressed the remote control, and [ Akatsubaki] activated, opening the cockpit to allow the pilot to enter. It even kneeled down automatically to let the pilot enter it easily. Ohh, that's rather amazing.

"I've input Houki-chan's data to a certain level. Now I just need to update the recent values! Then, *pi, pa, pa♪*! "

Tabane-san opened a control panel and slided her fingers on it. She then summoned out 6 screens in mid-air to navigate through the huge amount of data on the screen, and typed out on the emulated keyboard in mid-air.

"It's a close-ranged suit that's adjusted to being an all-around type, so I guess you will get used to it soon! Not to mention there's automatic support equipment! Onee-chan prepared them all!"

"Oh, thanks."

Houki still sounded rather cold. Really, since you two are sisters, I think you should warm up to her more.

I'm not too sure of this myself, but Houki seems to hate Tabane-san because she had to transfer schools when Tabane-san introduced the IS.

But that was a long, long time ago. She should let go of it now, right?

"Mn~fu, fu, fufu~♪ Houki-chan's kendo skills are even more refined. I can tell from your trained muscles. Yaa Yaa, onee-chan's really proud of you."

"..."

"Hehe, I got ignored--okay, optimization is complete~ that was fast, as expected of me."

Spouting nonsense, Tabane-san never stopped typing. It resembles someone playing the piano more than typing a keyboard, fast and fluid, and she even went through all the pages that switched around.

Though she's rather frivolous, she is a super genius. Again, I realized this.

On a side note, probably because of the pre-input data, the IS [Akatsubaki] didn't change amazingly like the [ Byakushiki]. The more it felt like was that it was suited for Houki's body.

Speaking of which--

(This suit's also for close-range, right? There's nothing else other than a pair of Japanese swords on both sides of the waist.)

I suddenly thought of that because I felt that it resembled [Byakushiki].

But just now, Tabane-san just said that it has ' automatic support' and 'a close-ranged suit that's adjusted to an all-rounder'. Maybe it might have equipment like Blue Tears.

"That IS is to be given to Shinonono-san...? Because they're family?"

"Yeah, it feels a bit unscrupulous."

Voices like these can be heard from the crowd. Unexpectedly, the one who quickly squashed all these reactions was actually Tabane-san.

"Oh my, haven't all of you read history? This world has never been fair."

The girls who were called out immediately went back to work. As for Tabane-san, she just left it that as she continued the adjustments, or rather, she never stopped typing even though she was talking. She's really a genius .

Then, the adjustments were complete, and Tabane-san closed the screens.

"After that, it'll just be adjustments, and the personalization will be complete. Ah, Ii-kun, let me see [ Byakushiki]. This Tabane-san's really enthusiastic!"

"Huh? Ah, okay."

After closing all the screens and keyboard, Tabane-san turned to me. Her light skirt flutters as it gives off a polished woman vibe that's completely opposite of her childish personality.

Anyway, I put my left hand on my right arm as I concentrate.

(--Come out, [Byakushiki].)

As if responding to my thoughts, [Byakushiki] dispersed in balls of light. The lights then gathered in mid-air to form a circle, spinning a few layers around me before forming.

This is my personal IS [Byakushiki], a machine that was developed for close-ranged combat. The weapon's a [Yukihira Niigata] sword, and it is a stubborn suit that refuses to have any more armaments--well, that doesn't sound right.

"Let me see the figures~uriya!"

Saying that, Tabane-san just inserted the circuits into the Byakushiki's armor. And just like before, the screens appeared in the air.

"Mn~...to actually create such an unbelievable **diagram** like this. What is this? I never seen this state before. Is it because Ii-kun's a guy?"

Let me explain this. The **diagram** here refers to the development path the IS takes according to the person. In human terms, it's the genes.

"As for what Tabane-san just said...why can I pilot an IS when I'm a guy?"

"Hm? Well, why..., I'm not too sure myself. I could understand it if we were break it down to nano units. Can I do it?"

On a side note, the target of breaking down would definitely include me.

"How can I..."

"Ah haha, I knew you would say that. Well, forget about it. I'll just won't know about what I don't know then. I set the ISes to evolve on their own when I created them, so it was obvious such a thing would happen, hahaha."

Well--the problem wasn't solved anyway.

"Also, why can't I have any other armaments?"

"Well, I set it like that."

"Huh...WHAAAT? Tabane-san created [Byakushiki]?"

"Mn, yup. Actually, I just retrieved the scrapped flawed machine and tweaked it slightly until it could move. But thanks to that, you can use the [One-off Ability] in your first phase, right? That's super convenient. Yup! Also, how should I say it? It was developed like this, you know? In Japan."

"Idiot, stop revealing so much classified information!"

*BAM!* Tabane-san's head got hit without mercy. The one who attacked was obviously our instructor from hell Chifuyu-nee.

"OWWW! Huh, Chi-chan's affections have been too intense up till now."

"SHUT UP!!"

And another hit! While Tabane-san's rubbing her head in pain, a girl called out to her.

"Ex-Excuse me! I heard of Professor Shinonono before. If possible, could you please check my IS?"

I thought who that girl was. It's Cecilia. Most likely, she felt excited about seeing the famous Tabane-san in front of her as her eyes are glowing exceptionally. However--

"Ah? Who are you? I don't recognize some blond person. And right now, it's a touching reunion with Houki-chan, Chi-chan and Ii-kun after so many years. I don't know why are you interrupting me. Who are you anyway?"

Her tone suddenly got cold, the content, the eyes and even the tone got cold.

"Huh, that..."

"Shut up and move aside."

"Uu..."

After being rejected again, even Cecilia backed away while looking completely distraught. She got rejected

without even having the chance to be shocked by the sudden change in Tabane-san's attitude as her eyes got teary.

Well, this person hasn't changed at all...

According to her, the reason is that 'I can't tell the difference between humans. The only people I know are Houki-chan, Chi-chan and Ii-kun. Papa and mama may count as well. Ufufu, that's because I have no interest in other people at all!"

That's why Tabane-san treated everyone else beside us like that. But, well, she did improve in this case, which made me rather shocked.

(She would ignore others in the past...)

On a side note, that seemed to be trained into her by Chifuyu-nee. At least she would answer others now.

"Hoo--weird blond hair. I hate the thick skin of the Japanese. Japanese are the best~ but I don't care about Japanese either way except for Houki-chan, Chi-chan and Ii-kun."

"Uncle and aunty too?"

"Hm? Well--...that's right."

Hm? Why do I find that her answer was a little false?

"Never mind, that's not important. More than that... Ii-kun, I'll modify your [Byakushiki]."

"Huh? Well...let me ask this. How?"

"Hmm...how about a butler? I always felt that Ii-kun's well suited to wear a cocktail suit! Or a maid outfit."

Very good. I'll just pretend that I didn't hear that last sentence.

"Can you not say it now..."

"'Kay! Oh, you agreed! Then let's begin--"

"Ahh! DON'T MISTAKE MY WORDS DELIBERATELY!! I'M SAYING NO! NO! NO, THANK YOU--!"

"Well, I'll Northern Lights then!"

Huh...what's with this unrelated match of starting things with 'no'...

"So how about it, Ii-kun? How would you look as a girl?"

"WHAT WAS THAT?"

"Hm? I've been reading these scenarios in manga recently."

"DON'T EXPERIMENT THE CONTENT OF A MANGA ON ME!!"

"Che~ Ii-kun's really too much!"

"Ah--ahem."

Houki coughed twice to interrupt our conversation.

"Am I done here?"

"Mn, it's done. Oh, 3 minutes over. Ahh, I could have used the time to cook a cup of instant noodles. Too bad."

No, there's nothing to feel bad about...also, nowadays, instant noodles won't even need 3 minutes, Tabane-san.

"Then try taking it for a ride. Fly it a bit! It should follow Houki-chan's thoughts~"

"Okay, I'll try it."

*Phoosh phoosh!* With that sound, the cables linking to it were removed. After that, Houki closed her eyes, and [Akatsubaki] flew off at a really fast speed.

"WAH!"

The sudden acceleration caused shockwaves that made the sand dance about. As I turned to look at Houki, [Byakushiki]'s super-sensors captured [Akatsubaki] that was flying 200m above.

"How is it? Much more mobile than what Houki-chan expected?"

"Mn...yeah, sort of..."

Tabane-san's most likely strapped with an IS as well, as I can sense that she's using the public channel to communicate.

"Then try swingging your swords. The right one is [Amatsuki][3C 3], and the left one is [Karaware][3C 4]. I'm going to send the special data of the weapons over!"

After saying that, Tabane-san danced her finger at the sky. Having received the weapon data, Houki drew both swords with a swoosh. The clean strike amazes me.

"Let's add on Tabane-onee-chan's explanation~♪! [Amatsuki]'s used to attack one person. The blade will create an energy blade attack when it attacks. It can turn an enemy into a beehive if it's used consecutively! It's a wonderful weapon~ the range is about as far as an assault rifle, no? It can't reach the range of a sniper rifle, but it's balanced out by the speed of [Akatsubaki]."

I don't know if she was going along with Tabane-san's explanation, but Houki got ready to swing the blade. She raised her right hand to her left shoulder into the Shinonono-nitoryu kendo style-the shield-sword style. That's a position that can easily turn defense into attack, using the force of the attack to counter.

As the blade got swung out, the surrounding space let out several red lasers, forming a ball-shaped thing. They then formed bullets of light and pierced out several holes in the clouds in the air.

"The next one's [Karaware]. It's a weapon used to deal with a group, and can launch a shaped attack with the

slash! It can extend its range when it's swung, so it's super useful. Try hitting some of them here!"

After saying that, Tabane-san summoned a 16-missile pod firing machine. As the lights gathered and formed it, it shot out its missiles at that instant.

"Houki!"

"--Don't worry! If it's this [Akatsubaki]!"

Like what Houki said, she swung the [Karaware], that was tucked under her right armpit, one round. The red lasers extended out just like Tabane-san said, taking out all 16 missiles.

"Powerful..."

Gradually appearing from the smoke of the explosion, Houki and her red IS looked as imposing as ever.

Everyone present looked stunned and mesmerized by the overwhelming outcome in front of them, unable to say anything. Tabane-san seemed satisfied as she viewed the scene in front of her, nodding away.

"..."

However, only one person's staring at Tabane-san sternly.

That person is--

(Chifuyu-nee...? Why would she show such a look? It seems like she's looking at an enemy--)

"TH-THI-THIS IS BAD! O-ORI-ORIMURA-SENSEI!"

The sudden voice of Yamada-sensei caused Chifuyu-nee to keep her sharp eyes and turn to her.

Though Yamada-sensei's normally panicking, it felt different this time.

"What's wrong?"

"Pl-Plea-Please look at this."

On seeing the visual image Yamada-sensei passed over , Chifuyu-nee's face darkened.

"Class A special mission, and a request to deal with it immediately..."

"Th-That's...located at the Hawaiian research--"

"Shh! Don't leak confidential information. The students will hear it."

"So-Sorry..."

"The pilot of the personal IS?"

"One-One's missing. The rest are present."

Chifuyu-nee and Yamada-sensei seem to be discussing about something in a soft voice. Once they notice several students looking here, they started using hand signals instead.

(Uu, not a normal sign language...is that a military related hand signal?)

I used to see those hand signs when Chifuyu-nee was the representative of Japanese. It feels that both of them are alike.

"I-I'll contact the other teachers then."

"Got it--EVERYONE PAY ATTENTION!!"

After Yamada-sensei ran away, Chifuyu-nee clapped twice to gain everyone's attention.

"The IS Academy teachers are now going to carry out a special mission, so today's testing will be over. Every class is to keep the ISes and return back to the resort. You are to remain in your own rooms. That's all!"

"Huh...?"

"End? Why? The special mission is..."

"I don't understand at all..."

The unexpected situation caused the girls to chatter away.

But Chifuyu-nee roared,

"EVERYONE IS TO HURRY UP AND HEAD BACK! WHOEVER'S COMES OUT WITHOUT PERMISSION WILL BE LOCKED UP! AM I CLEAR!?"

""""YE-YES!""""

Everyone started moving frantically, removing the equipment on their bodies, shutting down the activated ISes and putting them on the vehicles. It seems that they got scared by Chifuyu-nee's roar.

"Personal IS pilots are to gather! Orimura, Alcott, Dunois, Bodewig, Huang, and...Shinonono!"

"Yes!"

Answering really loudly was Houki beside me. Oh yeah, she can be considered as one with a personal IS.

(But is it...really alright...?)

For some reason, I developed this weird sense of anxiety from this panic.

"Now, let me explain the situation."

The room full of teachers and personal IS pilots, as we all gathered inside the deepest banquet hall of the resort, the Kachihana Room. The room with the lights still off has a large screen floating in mid-air.

"There's news that 2 hours ago, the [Silver Gospel], a 3rd generation military use IS that was developed by both America and Israel, went out of control in the test facility in Hawaii and left the surveillance facility."

Hearing Chifuyu-nee's sudden explanation, I was gob-smacked all of a sudden...huh? What? Military use IS ? Out of control? Why must they inform us?

Somewhat puzzled, I'm rather mindful of the other members' reactions as I look around.

"..."

All of them are looking serious.

Everyone else other than Houki and I are official representatives of other countries, so maybe they've received training for this kind of situation. Laura's eyes are looking exceptionally serious.

"After that, through satellite tracking, we found that the [Gospel] will enter our air space, 2 km from here. That will happen in approximately 50 minutes from now. Thus, according to the Academy's higher-ups jurisdiction , we have to deal with this situation.

Chifuyu-nee calmly said on. What she said next came unexpected.

"All staff members, please use the Academy's training suits to seal off the air space and sea. The main operation will be done using personal ISes."

Wha what? That means that that rampant military IS-- will have to be stopped by us?

"Next, we'll be beginning the planning of the battle. Anyone with doubts, please raise your hand."

"Yes."

Cecilia immediately raised her hand,

"Please explain the specs and data of the target IS."

"I understand. But these are the highest military secrets of those two countries, so it definitely can't be revealed. Once the data's revealed, the parties involved will be court-martialed, and they have to take at least 2 years of probation."

"I understand."

I don't really understand the situation now, but including Cecilia, everyone present are already discussing about getting the data.

"It's a unique long ranged type that's designed to clear the area...it seems that it can launch a full-scale attack like my IS."

"It's frame has enhanced attack and mobility. That's tough. And the specs are better than my [Shenlong], so the opponent has a slight advantage..."

"This unique armor seems to be tough to handle. My country sent a few [Revive] defensive equipment over, but I do feel that it's tough to defend against them consecutively."

"And looking at these figures, its fighting capability is still an unknown variable. The technology it has is also unknown. Can't we investigate it anyway?"

Cecilia, Rin, Charl and Laura are all seriously exchanging views. As for me, I managed to recover from this chaotic situation, but I still can't catch up to them. Honestly, I'm really useless.

"Can't be helped. This machine's still moving at a supersonic speed. The maximum velocity it has is over 2450km/hr, so there's only one chance."

"Only one chance...that means, we can only launch a suit with a sure-kill attack, right?"

After hearing Yamada-sensei's words, everyone turned to me.

"Huh...?"

"Ichika, beat it with your [Reiraku Byakuya]."

"That's the case. However, the problem is--"

"How are we going to send Ichika there? It'll be hard for us to succeed if we don't focus on the attack, but how are we going to move there?"

"And we have to catch up to a fast moving IS. The super sensors are important, right?"

"Ho-Hold on a minute! I-I'm going?"

""""""OF COURSE!""""""

All four of them answered in unison.

"Orimura, this isn't training, it's a real battle. If you're not ready, don't force yourself."

--

Once Chifuyu-nee said that, I immediately kicked off the cowardice in me.

"I'll do it. I'll do my best."

"Very good. Now, let's discuss the battle plan. Amongst you pilots, who has the fastest speed."

"My [Blue Tears]. It just so happened that the [Strike Gunner] England sent over had a high-capability sensor equipped with it as well."

All IS have what's called [Packet] switch equipment.

The [Packet] includes the weapons, additional armor and boosters. There are all sorts of varieties to them. One of them includes a specialized set called an [Haute Couture] that's used to create special unit sets, though I've never actually seen that before...

The IS machines capability and nature will change drastically according to the packet, and can allow for all sorts of combat. On a side note, all the first year personal IS pilots, including me, have a semi-customized packet.

--Ah, except for Charl whose packet is fully customized...that's really easy to mix up.

"Alcott, how long have you been training under supersonic mode?"

"20 hours."

"U...that's indeed suitable—"

Chifuyu-nee gets ready to end this planning, only to be interrupted by a super energetic voice.

"HOLD ON, HOLD ON! STOP WITH THAT STRATEGY~!"

And the voice came from the ceiling. Everyone looked up to see Tabane-san's head appearing upside down from the ceiling.

"...Yamada-sensei, please forcefully escort that person out."

"Huh? Ye-Yes! Ah, Professor Shinonono, please get her down first."

"TOU!"

Tabane-san flips a somersault in mid-air and lands. That gentle movement is something even a clown from a circus has to admire. How far is this person going to show her cards like that...

"Chi-chan Chi-chan, my brain's now printing an even more brilliant plan!"

"...Get out."

Chifuyu-nee pressed against her head. Though Yamada-sensei wanted to follow orders and escort Tabane-san out, Tabane-san easily slipped away from her .

"Listen to me, listen to me! This is de~fin~ite~ly the time for [Akatsubaki]'s debut!"

"What?"

"Look at [Akatsubaki]'s specs! It can fly at supersonic speeds even without additional packets."

As if responding to Tabane-san's words, screens appear around Chifuyu-nee.

"Adjusting [Akatsubaki]'s [Fold-Out Armor]...change change change! See? The speed will be great now!"

[Fold-Out Armor]? What's that?

Just when I'm puzzled about this strange name, Tabane-san's already standing beside Chifuyu-nee and explaining it to her, even taking away the mains screen from her. What was an image of the [Gospel]'s data is now switched to [Akatsubaki]'s specs.

"Let me explain. Here it comes~this so-called [ Fold-Out Armor] will be the 4th Generation frame's equipment that this genius developed for the 4th generation IS!"

Fourth...?

"OK! Now, the kind-hearted Tabane-san will start explaining~ this is for Ii-kun! Hehe, are you happy yet? First, the 1st generation frames were aimed to 'complete the IS'. The 2nd generation is to 'diversify according to the different equipment'. Next, the 3rd generation 'carries

unique weapons that're controlled by the pilot's imagination', including air-compressed weapons, BiTs and AIC. And the 4th generation are those 'all-purpose frames that don't need a change in equipment'. Right now, it's still on the planning phase. Okay, do you understand, Ii-kun? Sensei loves the outstanding students best."

"Hm, oh. Huh, no, about that..."

Hol-Hold on a minute. I remember that all the countries finally managed to enter the 3rd generation phase after so much experimenting. Why have we jumped all the way to the 4th generation now?"

"Fufufu, this Tabane-san isn't just an ordinary genius! This is just an appetizer from me!"

An appetizer. Doesn't sound nice for some reason...

"This was already used on the [Yukihira Niigata] of the [Byakushiki]. I installed it to try it out~"

""""Huh?""""

What she said caused every personal IS pilot other than me to be stunned.

The base construct when activating the [Reiraku Byakuya] of the [Yukihira Niigata] is actually the so-called [Fold-Out armor]. If that's the case, [Byakushiki ] itself is a 4th generation already.

"And because the development went well, [Akatsubaki ]'s entire armor is made of [Fold-Out Armor]! When the system's at its maximum ability, the specs will double!"

"Ho-Hold, hold on a minute. Huh? Whole body? The armor's the same as [Yukihira Niigata]? That means..."

"Yup, it's invincible! Anyway, it's the strongest."

Everyone present is dumbfounded. The only one who didn't respond is likely Chifuyu-nee as everyone's just shocked by what this Shinonono Tabane in front of us said.

"Also, [Akatsubaki]'s [Fold-Out Armor] is of the instant configuration type, so it can change to attack, defense and mobility along the way. This is the aim of the 4th generation frame, a multi-type frame. Fufufu, I prepared it a long time ago. Hohoho~"

Everyone's silent.

"Huh? What's wrong? Why is everyone looking like they're keeping vigil at a funeral? Who's dead? That's strange."

That's not something that can be excused with the words 'that's strange'.

All the countries invested money, time, talent in an arms race to develop the 3rd Generation IS frame...

And all that was actually meaningless.

How, how can there be such a stupid thing!!??

"--I told you before already, Tabane. You overdid it."

"Really? Hehe, I got too into it accidentally~"

Tabane-san seemed to have finally understood why we remained silent after Chifuyu-nee explained it to her.

"Ah, but you see, [Akatsubaki]'s still incomplete, so don't show such an expression, Ii-kun. Seeing you look so down-heartened, this Tabane-san really doesn't want to play pranks now."

No...it's useless even if you continue blinking at me like that...

"Well—about that, that's when [Akatsubaki]'s at full power. Finishing this mission is just a warm-up before dinner!"

Before dinner...no, never mind. Never mind at all.

"Speaking of which, about that rampant incident, it reminds me of that [White Knight] Incident ten years ago !"

Tabane-san chuckles away, and beside her, Chifuyu-nee gives an 'uh oh' look.

The **[White Knight] Incident—**

Everybody in the world should have heard of this name.

Tabane-san introduced IS ten years ago, but at the beginning, no one recognized her accomplishments.

Nobody believed that it could 'surpass all current weapons'.

Some of them even felt that those words 'couldn't be trusted'.

"Oh my, I never thought that this world would be that stupid. Ufufu, they wouldn't believe my ability, yet they would believe God's blessing. This so-called Idol worship is simply amazing. This Tabane-san's an actual living person!"

A year after the IS was introduced, an incident happened.

Well, it would be too weird to call it an incident, since there's nothing more critical than that point.

A hacker sent 2,341 missiles from all the countries in the world at Japan, making them unable to be controlled--and launched them all.

The whole world sunk into chaos and despair.

At that moment, a female in a full silver and white armor appeared.

As that female's face was covered thoroughly by some facemask-type sensors, nobody knew her real identity. However, how should I put it—it was really too similar

to some shounen manga plot, as it left everyone speechless.

The hero who was dressed like some Middle Ages knight actually,

"She slashed them all! She slashed about half of the missiles, 1,221 missiles in all. That's so cool~"

That female was holding a sword no matter what, yet unexpectedly, the human actually flew at supersonic speed to slash down these modern-day weapons called missiles, so it really seemed exaggerated.

Then, as the guided missiles are a bit away from her, she suddenly wipped them out with what was called a large charged particle gun, destroying them all.

With a combat ability that's based around speed, an ability to create a large number of things through light particles and the practical usage of light weapons—no modern weapons were a match for it.

However, the entire world's not so slow as to not deal with this starling existence. The countries around Japan ignored the world's constitution and started tracking through scout planes.

The mission of those scout planes was to 'Investigate the Target. Capture If Possible, If Impossible—Eliminate'.

At that time, all the countries seemed to have invested a lot into the latest weapons.

--But they were completely outmatched.

"Vulcan guns or guided missiles couldn't even hurt the armor of the IS. There was even an energy shield."

First, the fighter planes couldn't turn about immediately as the human pilot can't handle the tremendous G-Force.

But the IS was different. With the defense system guarding it, no matter how mobile the frame was, the pilot would not lose consciousness nor gasp for breath.

And according to the figures the sensors calculated, the IS could process calculations faster and make decisions faster. It could also change into action.

Despite sinking all the fighter planes of all the countries, the [White Knight] didn't take a single life away. This proved the battle difference that they despaired over.

Anyway, the thing was that 'It could make the opponent powerless without killing them'.

Even so, all the countries still sent in troops, yet the [White Knight] suddenly vanished like the sunset. It was like the VTR image of it got rewound and suddenly disappeared, as the illusion-like [White Knight] disappeared completely.

They couldn't track it down using radar, and they couldn't identify it through their own eyes. It showed complete invisibility.

Facing the ability it showed off—this world lost completely.

One machine was able to destroy or disable 2,341 missiles, 207 fighter jets, 7 cruisers, 5 aircraft carriers and 8 satellites. This 'Ultimate Mobile Weapon' IS instantly became famous in one night.

*Having a machine that can overpower other countries' military capability*, this fact prompted the entire world to immediately propose a constitution about IS to limit its use and also to spread it about.

Shinonono Tabane once said that 'Only an IS can beat an IS', and with the facts in front of them, the losers of this fight, the world accepted it without disagreements—they had to.

"So because of that, my beloved IS became famous! I don't care about the fact that women got special treatment, but I could be kidnapped or assassinated if I'm careless. That really felt like some other country. Ufufu ♪."

Describing it really happily, Tabane-san seemed to be gloating like a mother whose son just performed on stage for the first time.

"Even so, I don't know~ufufu, who was the [White Knight]? Who was it? What do you think, Chi-chan?"

"I don't know."

"Hm, I guess her bust size is about 88cm—"

*GONG!* A blunt sound could be heard. That's Chifuyu-nee's attendance book attack. No wait, that's the info terminal attack.

Uboah...the info terminal is made of metal on the outside, right...

"That, that's too much, Chi-chan. This Tabane-san's brain got split into half, you know!?"

"Really? That's good. You can take turns thinking with your left brain and your right brain."

"Ohh! I see! You're so smart, Chi-chan~"

...I mentioned it quite a bit already...but this person in front of Chifuyu-nee and talking back at her is the genius amongst geniuses who developed the IS, Shinonono Tabane. Oh well, I better not do this explanation any more...

Hm? Speaking of which, this means that Tabane-san doesn't know who the [White Knight] was? She did send the IS directly to the person.

"Chi-chan was really active in that incident."

"Yup, the [White Knight] was really active."

...Well, logically speaking, it should be Chifuyu-nee, right? I guess.

But the IS Chifuyu-nee used when it was active was completely different from the [White Knight]'s IS exoskeleton.

So where did the [White Knight]'s IS go? It was the first operational IS in history, and it should be in some sort of research facility for others to analyze data from as they toiled on without breaks.

Besides, after the last frame of the current 467 ISes was completed, there was no more production of it. Strictly speaking, there should be 467 IS cores.

In other words, no country would play around with a core.

(Huh, I remember when Tabane-san disappeared 3 years ago, she left behind a letter saying 'This is the last core, not a bun. Congratulations, you people got an IS effortlessly' or something like that.)

The reason why I knew this was because the world aired a show called 'Shinonono Tabane's live interview with the world'. However, the mass media that went to the research facility went for naught as they only saw a letter and the last IS core. That image was aired directly on worldwide live TV.

(...But what's going on? Chifuyu-nee, Tabane-san, it seems that my elders around me have a habit of disappearing.)

If that's really the case, this will be the toughest part—anyway, now's not the time to talk about it.

On a side note, amongst all the IS in the world, 322 out of the 467 ISes are used for actual combat, and the remaining 145 are handed over to all the countries research facility or enterprises as research. Many of the experimental frames that were born out of the researches from these areas were handed over to personal IS pilots.

In IS Academy, the ISes are divided into teachers' use, training use and personal use. In total, there are about 30 of them. However, there seemed to be quite the anomaly

this year, as amongst the 1st years, there are more than 5 personal IS pilots—In the past, there used to be only about 3 at the most.

The reason why there are so many IS pilots with personal machines this year is—I guess, me? There were supposed to be more 3rd generation ISes, and with 'The only male that can pilot an IS', every country started making their own moves...I guess. Either way, I don't really understand things that are too complicated.

"Speaking of which...Tabane, how long does it take to adjust [Akatsubaki]?"

"O-ORIMURA-SENSEI?"

Cecilia shouted out in shock. It seemed that she felt that she was the only one amongst all of us who had a hi-powered booster and could take part in the battle.

"If-If it's me and [Blue Tears], we'll definitely succeed!"

"Has that packet been installed?"

"We-Well...not yet..."

Cecilia's voice immediately softened as if her foot got stepped on, stuttering at the same time. In contrast, Tabane-san revealed an innocent smile as she said,

"Let me add on, it'll take just 7 minutes to adjust [ Akatsubaki]!"

"Okay, then this mission will be carried out by Orimura and Shinonono. You're to track the target to take it down. 30 minutes later, get ready to act. Everyone's to get ready in 30 minutes from now."

*PAN!* Chifuyu-nee clapped her hands, and the teachers got ready to prepare the necessary machinery.

"Those with nothing to do are to help move the equipment or do anything else they can help with. The main frontlines are to adjust their ISes. Don't be sloppy."

Uu, we got scolded again. Actually, looking carefully, I'm the only one who hasn't gotten into action as everyone else

"Huh, what about me...?"

"Complete [Byakushiki]'s configurations. Also, remember to fill up your energy gauge."

"Un-Understood."

After answering that, I immediately summoned [ Byakushiki]'s control panel. As for energy...there's no problem, and there's nothing really insufficient now. If that's the case, I can sortie anytime.

(Speaking of which, Houki is--)

"Then let's hurry up and get [Akatsubaki] ready!"

"..."

"Nua— you should smile more. Hey hey, you're already a member of this mission group. Isn't that good?"

"This face of mine was born like this."

"Mn—but well, you were a lot cuter when you were born. And you would cry too."

"Who-Who wouldn't cry—"

Tabane-san casually added a maybe as she patted [Akatsubaki] summoned by Houki.

"Uu, I'll pat here, pat her. The [Fold-Out armor] on the back, the legs, the shoulders seem to be forcefully pushed forward, and some attack support mode, and we're done. Well, let's get star—ted."

After Tabane-san finished her line, the particles of light gathered around her to form something.

Something appeared in front of her shoulders, 2 on each side, 4 in total. They all look like IS arm armor no matter the size.

"Is this Tabane-san's IS...?"

"Hm--? Far from it, Ii-kun. This is my mobile lab! On a side note, it's called 'I'm a cat' (I don't have a name yet)."

Tabane-san said that as she flipped her index finger up . Unexpectedly, those two right-hand-styled objects followed her action...what-what's going on, really...

"Okay, let's start."

After Tabane-san said that, she used the gaps between her fingers to pick up 10 tools, including screwdrivers, chisels, Swiss-army knife and all sorts of tools with unknown purposes.

"Funfu, raise your right hand if it hurts~"

And she added such a classic line before starting.

She used what looked like a Swiss-army-knife to cut off the joint on the IS arm (I really couldn't see it from the exterior), and then quickly used other tools to fix it in place. She then pulled out some mechanical parts and modified it. As this action was going on in five separate places, it really looked confusing.

Tabane-san was working on the toughest part, and the 4 floating arms were working on the rest.

Each unique finger of the arms seemed to have a lot of machinery and functions, as these arms were shooting out lasers from the mechanical fingers as these got to work.

However, what's most surprising is that Tabane-san didn't need any mechanical support as well—in other

words, she's doing this alone without any hi-tech equipment or even protective glasses.

(How-How in the world can she deal with such intricate stuff...?)

And she herself is looking rather relaxed as she hummed, working at a fast pace to boot.

"Ha--Only the jaw's sent from afar~♪"

*What do you mean by 'Jaw sent from afar'?* I really don't understand Tabane-san's thought process.

Thinking about this, I suddenly exchanged looks with the anxious Houki.

"Wha-What's wrong?"

"Hm? No, it's nothing."

"Re-Really?"

"..."

"..."

Just like that, I continued to stare at her like that without reason.

"Wha-What are you trying to do!?"

Uh oh, I made her angry.

"No, it's nothing much—ADAA!!"

Just when I was talking to Houki meaninglessly, I got punched hard on the back of the head. This force definitely belongs to Chifuyu-nee.

"If you have nothing to do, learn from Alcott how to carry out a hi-speed battle."

"I-I got it."

*GOINK*, *POINK*, *DOIINNNGG*, with the BGM of these metal clashing together, I began to ask Cecilia...uu, seems like she's really dejected.

"Uh...I got scolded by Professor Shinonono, and I got kicked off the team. That's too cruel..."

"Hey, Cecilia. Heey, Heeyy."

"Yes...--KYAH!?"

Suddenly noticing that I'm staring at her face, Cecilia jumped up in a slight shock, and the equipment dropped down (luckily, it's a mini-screen). I quickly caught it.

"Woah, it's small, yet heavy..."

"Wh-Wha-What's the matter? Is-Is there anything...?"

"Well, Chifuyu-nee...no, Orimura-sensei told me to learn from you how to fight in hi-speed battles."

"I-I see!"

After hearing that, Cecilia's face immediately brightened. That's good. I was worried that she would be too depressed. It's better for a human to be happy than to be sad.

"Ah, ahem. Then, I'll give you some tips on what to look out for in hi-speed battles. Has Ichika-san used the hi-sensitivity Hyper Sensors yet?"

"Well, no."

"I see. I'll start explaining from here first. The so-called hi-sensitivity Hyper Sensors adjustments in a hi-speed battle would refer to—"

Cecilia put both hands on her hips and started explaining as per normal. At this moment, a voice interrupted,

"When using that, you'll feel that the world would slow down. Well, at the start anyway."

"Rin-san? I only just explained halfway through? Speaking of which, have you taken part in hi-speed battle training before?"

"12 hours. Well, not as much as Cecilia anyway."

Cecilia backed away, probably taken aback from Rin's response.

Even so, she coughed to clear her thoughts and explain again,

"The-Then, the reason why the slow feedback would occur is—"

"The hi-sensitivity Hyper Sensors would transfer such details to the pilot to sharpen the pilot's senses. In contrast, the pilot would feel that the world has became slower. But only at the beginning. You'll get used to it soon."

"Cha-Charlotte-san...? I only spoke halfway through—"

"More importantly, you should notice how much of the boost's left, especially when you use the [Ignition Boost], Ichika, so you have to be careful. In hi-speed battles, the rate that boost runs out will be twice the usual rate."

"Lau-Laura-san? I—"

"Also, as the acceleration will be faster than normal, the impact of ranged weapons will be even more devastating. One critical hit will be enough to cause armor damage, so be careful."

"EVEN YAMADA-SENSEI CAME TO INTERRUPT!! REALLY, WHY MUST EVERYONE COME AND INTERRUPT ME!?"

Cecilia finally got angry. It seemed that she couldn't take it anymore after being interrupted so many times.

"Ah—well, Cecilia."

"WHAT!?"

"Thanks for teaching me so much. Just tell me if there's anything else I need to take note of."

Completely enraged and losing her sanity, Cecilia sounded really crude, but got shocked after hearing my words. She blinked, not showing an angry look anymore.

"Huh, yeah, well, this-this is nothing. I'm Cecilia Alcott , the representative candidate of England after all. You can come and approach me if there's something you don't understand."

Fufun. She placed her hands on her hips and smiled. Yup, as per usual, I guess.

"Anyway, well, Ichika, your [Reiraku Byakuya] will be the key in this battle, so don't use [Ignition Boost]. That would burn a lot of energy."

The next person who spoke up was Rin. It seemed that she went through the last of her moving, so her work's done.

"Next, the thing will be how to defend. Really, it's better to have a shield to guard against an assault, but Ichika's always using his weapon with two hands."

Having ended her moving as well, Charl entered the conversation officially.

After that, even Laura and Yamada-sensei joined it. Though it's to plan for the battle, I do feel rather happy to have people gather around me like this.

(I must succeed no matter what.)

I again renew this determination in my mind.

The time now is 11:30am.

The July sky is as clear as ever, and the strong sunlight lights the land.

Standing slightly apart from each other, Houki and I are on the beach. After glancing at each other once, we nodded our heads.

"Come on out, [Byakushiki]."

"Let's go, [Akatsubaki]."

Our bodies got instantly covered in light, and the IS armors formed around us as a result. At the same time, the floating sensation caused by the PIC and the Power Assist bring lightness to the energy, causing my entire body to feel a change throughout.

"I'll leave it to you then, Houki."

"My pride would naturally prevent any man from mounting atop a woman, but I'll make a special exception this time."

In terms of the battle, Houki will have to do all the moving, which means I have to ride on her back.

Though Houki immediately protested unhappily after hearing this method, it seemed that her mood was incredibly good, or is it just me.

(But then again, is this really alright...?)

Houki got her personal IS less than a day ago, and no matter how good Tabane-san's personalization and the optimization are, the pilot can't possibly have it easy.

(I'll have to protect her if something happens.)

Thinking about this, I reinvigorate myself.

"Even so, it's good that we're here. If Ichika's with me, we can do anything. Isn't that right?"

"Well, that's right, but Houki, the teachers already said that this isn't training. We don't know what will happen in the actual battle, so we have to be really careful—"

"I know that. Fufu, what's wrong? Are you scared?"

"Of course not. I say, Houki—"

"Haha, don't worry, I'll send you to the destination properly. Just wait calmly."

"..."

Anyway, she's been like this since the beginning. I know that she's really happy that she has a personal IS, but isn't she too happy now? I leapt onto the back of Houki's [Akatsubaki], unable to get rid of that anxiety.

"Orimura, Shinonono, can you hear me?"

Chifuyu-nee's voice could be heard from the IS public channel. Houki and I nodded our heads in response.

"The main emphasis of this plan is to take it out in one strike. Remember, we have to win in a short time."

"Understood."

"Orimura-sensei, I just need to support Ichika according to the situation, right?"

"Right, but you don't have to force yourself. That personal IS you just got hasn't been used in combat. Maybe something might crop up."

"I understand. I'll provide assistance as much as I can."

Even though she sounded really calm, Houki sounded really happy, or rather, too happy. Hopefully, it's just me worrying too much...

"—Orimura."

"Ye-Yes."

Chifuyu-nee's voice came over through the private channel, and not the public channel she just used. I frantically switched over to that line.

"Shinonono seems to be a little excited. Something may pop up in that situation. If anything happens, support her."

"Understood. I'll take note of that."

"I'll leave it to you then."

Then, Chifuyu-nee switched her voice back to the public channel and gave the order,

"Then, begin the operation!"

--The operation began.

Houki carried me and got up to 300m height in one go.

Wh-Wha-What's with this speed!? It's like [Ignition Boost], maybe even faster...!

[Akatsubaki] continued to move up despite carrying this heavy load, and managed to get up to 500m height within a few seconds.

"Confirming the link to the satellite...information check's complete. Confirming the target's current location—Ichika, let's go!"

"Oh, okay!"

Houki said that as she continued to increase Akatsubaki's speed. The legs and back parts spray out powerful energy, as to be expected of the [Fold-Out Armor].

(That's the [Fold-Out Armor] similar to the [Yukihira Niigata]—and the complete one to boot.)

According to Tabane-san's explanation, [Akatsubaki]'s [Fold-Out] has the functions of attacking, defending and

agility, furthermore its IS armor seems to utilize this [Fold-Out Armor]. What will happen when it reaches full power...?

(But where did so much energy came from--)

"I see it, Ichika!"

"!"

The Hyper Sensors visuals show the target as if I was seeing it with my own eyes.

As the name indicates, the [Silver Gospel]'s covered in silver.

The strangest parts are the huge wings extending out from its head. According to the data, the silver-glow wings that are as shiny as the main body seem to have a lot of large boosters and wide-ranged shooting weapons.

(What in the world is the 'multi-direction' attack that the data indicated?)

--Either way, there's no time for me to think. We flew towards it at high speed, and I wielded the [Yukihira Niigata] in my hand.

"I'm going to accelerate! Reaching target in 10 seconds. Concentrate, Ichika!"

"Aa!"

Houki boosts the output of the thrusters and the [ Fold-Out armor]. The speed's really shocking as it closes the distance between the two frames at a high velocity.

5, 6, 7, 8, 9...10!

"UOOOOOOOOOOOOHHHHHHHH!!!"

With [Reiraku Byakuya]'s activated, I also activated [ Ignition Boost] at the same time to close in on the [Gospel ].

(I can make it--!!)

Just when my blade of light was about to touch the [ Silver Gospel],

"WHA!?"

The [Gospel] actually turned towards me at maximum velocity and backed away in preparation for battle.

(Let's readjust the battle position—no, I'll just attack it like this!)

Since we're already in attacking range, it's too late to back away.

If that's the case, it's better to finish it off before the opponent counters.

However—

"Enemy suit confirmed. Switching into counterattacking mode. [Silver Gospel], movement start."

"!"

A mechanical voice can be heard from the public channel, but I can clearly hear obvious 'antagonistic intent', and a thought passes my head.

--I have a bad feeling about this.

And then, in less than a few seconds, it became reality.

*Swoosh!* The Gospel's body suddenly swung beautifully, dodging [Reiraku Byakuya]'s blade with inch-perfect precision. Even for an IS that has [Passive

Inertial Canceller], this movement's still extremely difficult to pull off.

"Ku...! Those wings accelerated?"

Actually, there's a lot of high output multi-thrusters there, but I have never seen such accuracy at emergency velocity. For once, I have a whole new understanding to the term **Classified Military Secrets**.

"Back me up, Houki!"

"Got it!"

Anyway, it'll be bad for our side if we drag the battle on. I let Houki cover my back as I attacked the [Gospel] with a slash.

"Ku! This...!"

However, the [Gospel] swayed about gently and evaded at the last second, moving as if it was swimming or dancing.

As the remaining time for the [Reiraku Byakuya] was really little, I let out a huge swing at the [Gospel] after being bamboozled for so long.

And the [Gospel] didn't let go of this chance.

"!"

The silver wings, the armor with the thrusters on it expanded out like wings.

(DAMN IT! THOSE ARE--)

Cannons.

The Gospel presses the wings forward to aim the cannons at me. At the next moment, numerous bullets of light shoot out.

"KUU!?"

Those bullets were shot out with high pressure acting as the energy source, forming what looks like feathers. I thought they would hit the IS armor, but they exploded at the next moment.

The main armaments of the [Gospel] seem to be some explosive-type energy bullets, but the problem's—

(Even the firing rate is ridiculous...!)

The quantity and speed—this so-called rapid fire is really fast.

It's not really accurate, but since those are explosive bullets, one touch is enough to blow up a single crater.

"We're attacking from left and right, Houki! I'll leave the left to you!"

"Got it!"

Houki and I continue to do complex evasive maneuvers as we attack the [Gospel] from both sides.

--However, our attacks couldn't even reach it. The [Gospel] uses the specialized movements to dodge the attacks and counter. The uniquely shaped wing thrusters are used quite a lot, unlike what the unique appearance would indicate.

"I'll stop its movements, Ichika!"

"Got it!"

After saying that, Houki uses her blades to stab and slash, activating the [Fold-Out Armor] on her wings to match up with the energy blades that are formed as she attacks.

(Houki's machine is a monster too...!)

She uses [Akatsubaki]'s mobility and the [Fold-Our Armor] on different places at different timings, using emergency acceleration to bring herself closer to the [ Gospel]. This wave of powerful attacks force the [Gospel] to defend itself.

"HHAAAA!!!"

--We can do it!

Thinking about this, I grip the sword in my hands tightly, but unexpectedly, the [Gospel] counterattacked.

"La...♪!"

The sharp sound of the machine rang. At that moment, the wing thrusters went all out blazing, 36 barrels in total , all aimed in different directions.

"Not bad...! But who's shaking you off!?"

Houki dodged the rain of bullets at the last moment as she closed in on the attack—there's an opening.

"!"

However, I'm moving in a completely different direction, down at the sea below.

"Ichika!?"

"UOOOOOHHH!"

I let the [Ignition Boost] and [Reiraku Byakuya] exert full power as I chase behind the last bullet and strike it down.

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING!? THAT WAS A RARE CHANCE—"

"THERE'S A BOAT! THE TEACHERS SHOULD HAVE SEALED THE SEA OFF—DAMN IT, IT'S AN ILLEGAL TRAWLER!"

Even so, I couldn't leave it behind like that.

Kyuuuu...

The light on my [Yukihira Niigata] disappeared, and the [Fold-Out Armor] disappeared as well...I used up all my energy. I lost the one time to use it, and the key to this battle dissapeared.

"YOU IDIOT! WHY ARE YOU PROTECTING CRIMINALS...CAN'T YOU JUST LEAVE—"

"HOUKI!!"

"--!"

"Houki, don—don't say such disappointing words, don't do it! To actually lose sight of the weak, after gaining power...what's wrong, Houki!? That's not like you, not at all!!"

"I, well, I..."

Houki seemed like she was trying to hide her obviously wavering face as she covered her face with her hands. Seeing her dropped swords disappear into light, I panicked.

(That was [Limit Down]...! DAMN IT--!)

[Limit Down] means that the energy's used up. And right now, this isn't IS Academy arena, but a real battle.

"HOUKI--!!"

I threw my sword down and rushed towards Houki in a straight line, using all of my remaining energy to use [ Ignition Boost].

(Please! I have to make it!)

In front of my eyes, the [Gospel] again got ready to fire in the same manner, and it's now aiming at Houki.

An IS armor with its energy lost is extremely weak, so even the 4th generation [Akatsubaki] should be about the same. Even if she preserves the energy of the [Absolute Barrier], she won't be able to take a hit once she takes the Gospel's rapid-fire attack.

(PLEASE! PLEASE! [BYAKUSHIKI]! COME ON!)

In the midst of this slow moving world, my vision did capture the movement of the light bullets. The next moment, I rushed between the [Gospel] and Houki.

"GUUUUUAAAAHHHHH!!!"

The moment I covered Houki by hugging her, all the explosive light bullets hit my back.

The shields weren't able to completely negate the continuous volley of attacks, and I seemed to hear my bones crack as my muscles also let out a cry of agony. After the armor got destroyed completely, the burning sensation hit my skin.

The endless pain that was about to drive me crazy remained, and during that time, I just glanced at Houki.

(Ahh...you're alright...that's great...haha, why do you look like you're about to cry...that's really not like you. Ah, the ribbon got burned...fuun, you look rather good with your hair down...)

"ICHIKA! ICHIKA!! ICHIKAAA!!!!"

"Uu...ahh..."

The entire world went upside down—ahh, wait, I'm the one upside now.

With my head below and legs above, I used my last ounce of strength to hug Houki tightly to protect her head.

After that, a huge splash of water could be heard, together with the impact that spreaded throughout. Through the sea surface, I looked up at the [Gospel], and immediately lost consciousness.

## Chapter 4: Dressy White - Setsura

This happened when Ichika was in 2nd grade.

Having gone to the kendo dojo with Chifuyu-nee for one year, he finally trained quite a bit.

(Really—those guys--...)

For some reason, he just couldn't get along with the daughter of the kendo dojo owner, the girl who was of the same age as him. It was the same thing today. Both of them fought during morning practice, and it became a scuffle. In the end, Ichika got hit horizontally on the side and lost.

(Ah-- damn it--...can't I even beat her...I really want to win...)

Thinking about this, Ichika swept the classroom unhappily. The sunset after school was extremely bright. Ichika knew that everyone other than himself went off to play, but he didn't mind. He often felt that if there's a need to do things, he'd do it himself.

"Hey—tomboy~. You didn't bring your bokutou today ."

"...That's a shinai."

"Hehe, that weapon sure fits you as a tomboy~"

"..."

"Even the way you speak is weird~"

The girl didn't respond.

The three boys surrounded the girl, mocking her.

Even in this situation, the girl just casually glared back at them, not letting aside one bit—the girl's name was Houki.

"Ya—ii ya—ii, tomboy~"

"...You guys are really noisy. If you have so much time, just come over and help out. Ahh?"

Ichika felt that this meaningless harassment was really irritating, so he spoke up for his classmate.

"What's with you, Orimura? You want to stand up for her?"

"Heheh? You like this tomboy?"

No matter the times, the way kids make fun of others is illogical. Even though they're of his own age, this mockery made Ichika really unhappy.

"You guys are blocking me, I'm sweeping! Move aside!
"

"Oh~you're actually sweeping so seriously. What an idiot—OWAHH!"

Houki suddenly grabbed the boy on the collar. Even though they were the hands of a second grader, they were rather firm due to the training everyday. If she were to fight seriously, those 3 boys would most likely lose to her easily.

Houki didn't respond to how they laughed at her, yet she responded to that statement.

"WHAT'S IDIOTIC ABOUT SOMEONE DOING THINGS SERIOUSLY? AT LEAST HE'S A LOT BETTER THAN YOU GARBAGE!!"

"WHA-WHAT...WHY ARE YOU SO ANGRY? LET GO! LET GO OF ME!

Unlike the boy whose collar was grabbed by those strong arms, the other two boys revealed sinister smiles.

"Ahh—I see! Those two are a couple. I know, you two flirt with each other every morning."

(Wah, here we go! What couple? These guys really love to play this. I had enough of it.)

Ever since he went to Houki's dojo, Ichika was told this a few times. Speaking of which, this didn't hurt Ichika at all because he didn't have parents, and thus didn't have any real concept of a couple.

"Oh yeah, this guy even tied a ribbon a while back! This tomboy's really funny—FUU!"

This time, the one who got enraged was Ichika, who slammed a punch into the boy's face. Ignoring the dumbstruck boys around him, Ichika grabbed that boy who fell to make him stand up.

"FUNNY!? WHAT'S SO FUNNY ABOUT IT? IS IT FUNNY FOR HER TO WEAR A RIBBON? IT SUITS HER WELL, RIGHT? AH? SAY SOMETHING, YOU RETARD!!"

"Yo-You--!! I'll tell the teacher!"

"FINE BY ME, YOU BASTARD! I'LL BEAT ALL YOU GUYS UP FIRST."

Having fought again with the three boys, Ichika got caught by a teacher who overheard the commotion, and this incident ended just like that.

As Ichika practiced Kendo and also martial arts from Chifuyu, he was able to beat the three boys without so much as a scratch.

But this was where the trouble began.

Dastardly parents are still bastards, and this seemed to be a logic that doesn't change. Thus, the three bastards said that they wanted to report him to the police and even sue him.

Ichika didn't mind, but Chifuyu had to go to them and apologize to them, which made him unable to accept it.

*"I'll cause Chifuyu-nee problems if I get into trouble."*

Ever since then, Ichika learnt his lesson, and would deal with the dumb boys in a safe manner.

"...You're really an idiot."

"Ah? What? I'm not an idiot!"

After a few days, Ichika went to wash his face after the after-school training, and Houki spoke to him, a rare feat at that.

"Have you ever thought about how much trouble that would cause later?"

"Hm? About that? Yeah, I didn't. I just wanted to beat up people who can't be forgiven."

Though Chifuyu once lectured Ichika badly, he didn't feel that he was in the wrong. To the young Ichika, that was something he couldn't back away from.

"Besides, I hate the way they just used the fact that they had numbers. It's too despicable to gang up on one person like that. They're scum amongst men."

"..."

"So don't mind. That ribbon really suits you. Tie it up next time."

"Hu-Humph! I won't listen to your orders!"

Folding her arms in front of her chest, Houki turned her head at another direction. Ichika said 'I see' and continued to wash his face. He really liked to use the icy cold well water to wash away the sweat after practice.

"I'm going home then. Bye then, Shinonono."

"—It's."

"Hm?"

"My name's Houki. Shouldn't you remember that already? Besides, my dad, mom and sister have the same surname Shinonono. You'll just confuse me that way. Just call me by my name, got it?"

"Got it. I prefer to listen to what my acquaintances would tell me to do— well, the name's Ichika."

"Wha-What?"

"My name. There's also two people whose family name is Orimura. Just call me Ichika."

"Uu...mu."

"Got it, Houki?"

"I-I got it! I-I-Ichika! Is that alright?"

"Oh, that can do...would you accept it if it's a request instead of an order?"

"Hu-Humph!"

Houki tried to act tough before leaving. Looking at her leave, Ichika felt that she was really strange.

It was June, and summer was about to arrive.

"..."

It was one of the rooms in the resort, and the clock on the wall pointed at just before 4pm.

Ichika had already laid on the bed for more than 3 hours.

Waiting beside him, Houki continued to look distressed, and the hair without its ribbon showed her emotions.

(It was my fault...)

She remembered the smile Ichika unconsciously showed her.

However, Ichika had lost his smile now, and right now , he was just lying there lifelessly.

Ichika got the [Absolute Barrier] of his IS shattered, and he got burned hard as he was now covered with bandages all over.

(It's because of my uselessness that Ichika became like this--!)

Houki grabbed her skirt forcefully, and the force exerted on it caused her palms to turn pale. She continued to clench her fists tight as if she was punishing herself.

"Mission failed. I'll call you if there's a change in the situation. Before that, wait here for now."

After being rescued from the sea, Houki heard these words the moment she got back to the resort. After Chifuyu gave instructions on treating Ichika, she

immediately went back to the planning room. Houki felt even more miserable that she didn't get scolded.

(Why...am I always, this careless...)

She always got carried away after obtaining power.

She really wanted to use it.

She would always feel the impulse of wanting to use force.

(Why did I train for...!)

To Houki, kendo was not a tool to train herself, but to discipline herself.

--A seal.

A seal to control her violent impulses.

But...she knew of the limit that restrains this danger.

Like thin ice, it will break if she exerted a little force.

(I've already...IS...)

Just when she was about to make this important decision, the door got opened violently.

*BAM!!* The sudden opening of the door shocked Houki, but she had no strength to look over.

"Ahh— ahh— you're really easy to understand."

The girl who barged into the room without restraint walked over to the devastated Houki.

This voice belonged to— Rin.

"..."

"Hey, you!"

Rin said to her, but Houki didn't respond. She couldn't .

"You think you're the reason Ichika's like this, right?"

The [Absolute Defense] on the IS pilot, due to this fatal defense mechanism, Ichika became unconscious.

The IS used all the energy on the defense, saving the pilot's life in this manner. With the IS supporting, until it can recover, the pilot won't be able to wake up.

"..."

"So are you going to remain like this— DON'T MESS AROUND WITH ME!!"

Suddenly burning with rage, Rin grabbed the devastated Houki on the collar, forcing her to stand up.

"YOU SHOULD HAVE SOMETHING YOU MUST DO RIGHT? RIGHT NOW! HOW CAN YOU NOT FIGHT!!"

"I-I...well, I don't want to...pilot the IS again..."

"--!"

*PA!!*

Houki took a slap to the face and lost her balance, falling onto the floor.

Rin again grabbed Houki and glared straight at her.

"STOP MESSING AROUND...SINCE YOU'RE A PERSONAL IS PILOT, I WON'T ALLOW YOU TO BE STUBBORN! OR ARE YOU—"

Rin glared straight into Houki's eyes.

Her eyes were burning with determination, similar to a burning passion.

"—ARE YOU A COWARD WHO CAN'T FIGHT EVEN WHEN IT'S TIME TO FIGHT?"

Those words lit up the fighting will in Houki's eyes.

"—That's..."

The voice that was so teeny-weeny soft became louder due to anger.

"WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO!? WE DON'T KNOW WHERE THE ENEMY WENT! I WANT TO FIGHT THE ENEMY IF I CAN FIGHT!!"

Seeing Houki finally getting motivated again, Rin sighed slightly.

"At least you have the will now...ahh, that's so troublesome."

"Wha-What?"

"We know where the enemy went...right now, Laura's —"

As Rin spoke halfway, the door opened. Standing at the door was Laura in a black military uniform.

"It appeared. According to the recent confirmation, the target's more than 30km away above the sea. It's in stealth mode, but it doesn't seem to have used optical camouflage, so the satellites could pick it up."

Seeing Laura walk in with the tablet PC, Rin finally smiled as she awaited Laura's entrance.

"As expected of the German special forces, you're really something."

"Humph...what about you? Are you ready?"

"Of course, [Shenlong]'s special attack [Packet]'s installed. I wanted to ask how were Charlotte and Cecilia doing."

"Ahh, about that—"

Laura's eyes turn to the door, which opened again.

"Just finished."

"All preparations are A-Okay, we're ready to move out ."

As all the pilots with personal IS gathered, they all turn to look at Houki.

"Then, what do you intend to do?"

"I...I—"

Houki clenched her fists tight. Unlike the remorse she showed just now, this was a show of determination.

"I want to fight...I must fight, I must win! I can't allow myself to lose now!"

"Then it's decided!"

Rin folded her arms in front of her chest, revealing a fearless smile.

"Then, let's begin the battle planning! We'll take down the enemy for sure this time!"

"Yes!"

*Gya*...*gyann*...

(This place is...?)

Attracted by the sound of waves from afar, I'm walking alone on the unfamiliar beach.

As I step forward, the white sand below my feet would let out a sandy sound.

My feet feel the sand and the heat directly. There's the smell and sound of the tide and waves from the seas, and there's a cool breeze blowing at me, and the bright sun that's burning me slightly but painfully.

(Is...is it summer? Now...)

Where is this place? What's the occasion now? I have no idea at all.

For some reason, I'm wearing my uniform. My pants are rolled up as I'm walking barefoot on the beach. I'm even holding onto the shoes that were taken off, though I don't know when.

"--.-- ♪ ~-- ♪."

Suddenly, I hear singing.

A singing voice that's full of clarity and vibrancy.

Feeling somewhat mindful of it, I head towards where the singing's coming from.

*Kisu* *Kisu*

*Kisu* *Kisu* *Kisu*

The sand below the feet respond carefreely.

"La, la~ ♪,lalala ♪"

A girl's standing there.

The waves dampen her toes slightly, as the girl continued to sing and dance about.

Her shiny bright white hair dances around.

The white one-piece dress dances under the sea breeze, occasionally flipping up.

(Fum...)

For some reason, I didn't want to call her out, but sat down near a floating log. This log should have been washed ashore a while back, since the bark's almost completely peeled, and the colour's almost white.

I sat on the white sofa with an irregular shape, staring blankly at the girl.

*Gyagya*, the sound of the waves can be heard.

The occasional breeze felt comfortable, and I stared at the scenery in front of me in a trance-like state.

"..."

Awaiting 200m above sea surface, the [Silver Gospel] curled itself up like a baby.

The wings that extended out from its head covered the curled up body.

--?

The [Gospel] suddenly looked up.

The next moment, a supersonic bullet hit it on the head , causing a huge explosion.

"First bullet is a hit. Keep shooting!"

Floating 5km away, the [Schwarzer Regen], with Laura piloting it, fired the first shot before the [Gospel] could counterattack.

The [Schwarzer Regen]'s exterior was a lot different from usual, as two .80 caliber railguns [Purizushi] were each installed on both shoulders.

Also, to allow for long-range sniping with cannon fire, 4 physical shields were covering its left, right, front and back as protection.

This is the [Panzer Cannons] packet with the cannons installed on the [Schwarzer Regen]

(Enemy closing in...4000...3000...ku, faster than I expected!)

The next moment, the distance between both of them was 1000m, and the [Gospel] continued to close in.

Even though Laura continued to attack, the [Gospel] used both wings to shoot out energy bullets to take out the cannon bullets and close in on Laura.

"Che!"

To avoid recoil, the [Panzer Cannons] packet didn't allow much mobility.

In contrast, having its mobility customized, the [Gospel] suddenly accelerated from 300m away and reached out for Laura's right hand.

--She couldn't dodge it!

However, Laura curled her lips and smiled.

"—Cecilia!"

The [Gospel] reached out its arm to block the machine that descended from above.

A blue IS— [Blue Tears] launched a strong attack in stealth mode.

Unlike how it was normally, the 6 BITs were all arranged like a skirt on its waist, and the cannons were covered to act as thrusters.

Also, the high BT laser rifle [Stardust Shooter] was more than 2m long, more than enough to make up for the lack of firepower of the BITs.

Cecilia's head had the Hyper Sensor [Brilliant Clearance] installed on it to respond to speeds over 500km/hr to go along with her high powered mobility packet [Strike Gunner]. With the information it processed , she suddenly turned at a high speed and aimed at the [ Gospel] ready to attack.

"Enemy B confirmed. Proceeding with elimination."

"Too slow!"

After the [Gospel] dodged Cecilia's attack, another machine attacked from behind.

It was Charlotte, who climbed onto Cecilia's back when she launched the sneak attack in stealth mode.

The two shotguns were shot from behind at close range, causing the [Gospel] to stumble left and right.

But that was for a moment. It immediately launched a counterattack at the 3rd machine with the [Silver Bell].

"Oh sorry, but this [Garden Curtain] won't to be taken down so easily!"

The [Revive]'s defensive packet used the physical shields and energy shields to block the [Gospel]'s rain of bullets. Its figure seemed to resemble a normal [Revive], as both physical and energy shields blocked the front like a curtain.

While defending, Charlotte used her specialty [Rapid Switch] to summon an offensive Gatling cannon, using that time to counter.

With Cecilia moving at high velocity and attacking, and Laura shooting while pulling her distance, the [ Gospel] began to look damaged as it was attacked from three directions.

"...Changing priority. Now setting 'escaping air space' as priority."

Scattering energy bullets all over the place, the [Gospel ] immediately turned on all its thrusters as it intended to break through.

"DON'T YOU DARE GET AWAY!!"

The sea ruptured, and then exploded.

The crimson red machine [Akatsubaki] flew up with the [Shenlong] on its back.

"Take it down before it escapes!!"

[Akatsubaki] attacked the [Gospel], and Rin got off the back to get into battle mode with the [Landslide] packet on to allow an increase in functionality.

The 2 pairs of [Impact Cannons] on her shoulders, and the 4 cannons opened fire at the same time.

"!"

While [Akatsubaki] got away from the area after a little scuffle, the [Impact Cannon] bullets shot out from behind her. However, these weren't the invisible [Impact Cannons], but rather bullets covered in scarlet red flames . The numbers matched up to the rain of bullet from the [ Gospel], and the empowered [Impact Cannons] should really be called [Thermal Diffusion Impact Cannons].

"Did we get it?"

"—Not yet!"

Though the [Gospel] got hit directly by the [Diffusion Impact Cannons], it continued to move.

"The biggest counter of the [Silver Bell]—begins."

The [Gospel]'s arms extended to both the left and right sides, and even the wings expanded outwards—at that moment, a sharp glow of light exploded, and a rain of energy bullets began shooting.

"KU!"

"HOUKI, BEHIND ME!"

Looking at the last failure, Houki's [Akatsubaki] was still in a limited phase. To prevent it from overexerting the [Fold-Out Armor] and running out of energy, right now, the settings were set so that it wouldn't activate the [Fold-Out Armor] involuntarily even when on defense.

Of course, the reason why this readjustment was made was because she left the defense to Charlotte. This was to maximize the advantage in a group battle, by splitting the roles up.

"Even so...it's a little tough here."

Even though she had a defensive packet on, it was dangerous to continue taking the [Gospel]'s continuous attacks.

One of the physical shields was completely destroyed during this time.

"LAURA! CECILIA! PLEASE!"

"DO YOU NEED TO SAY ANY MORE?"

"LEAVE IT TO US!"

Laura and Cecilia moved forward to back up Charlotte who was backing away, and shot from both left and right sides. Cecilia used the hi-mobility mode to shoot, while Laura exchanged fire with her cannons.

"IT'LL BE OUR TURN ONCE THE ENEMY STOPS!"

Next, Rin attacked from below. Using the [Souten Gagetsu] to slash, she immediately let out the close ranged diffusion cannons to fire—the target's multi-thrusters on the [Silver Bell] that was connected to the head.

"DIE!!"

Even though the rain of energy bullets continued to pelt on her, Rin continued to slash.

The [Gospel] let loose a spread similar to the [Impact Cannon], and both sides got severely damaged. Rin finally managed to slice off one of the [Gospel]'s wings.

"Haa, haa...! HOW ABOUT THAT—KU!?"

Though left with only one wing, the [Gospel] immediately readjusted itself and gave Rin's left hand a roundhouse kick. This kick, with the thrusters on the foot turned on, smashed Rin's shoulder armor and caused her to fall towards the sea.

"RIN! DAMN IT--!"

Houki, wielding one sword in each hand, quickly hacked at the [Gospel].

As the Emergency acceleration caused it to lose balance, the [Gospel] got a cut on its right shoulder.

(Got it--!)

Just when Houki thought this, something unbelievable happened. The [Gospel] used its hand to grab both left and right swords.

"WHAT?"

The energy released from the swords could break through the armor, but the [Gospel] didn't seem to mind as it opened its arms wide.

With the swords pulled apart, Houki was forced to open her arms wide, revealing a completely defenseless position. At this moment, the [Gospel] opened the cannons on its remaining wing as it got ready to attack.

"HOUKI! LEAVE THOSE WEAPONS AND ESCAPE!"

But Houki didn't leave her weapons behind.

(...If I back away here, why did I...)

The loaded energy bullets fired out at the same time.

(WHY DID I WANT TO GET POWER!)

A second before she got hit by the energy bullets, [Akatsubaki] spun around, and the [Fold-Out Armor] on the toes seemed like it responded to Houki's will as it created an energy blade.

"AHHHHH!!"

Houki swung her foot and used the energy blade to slice.

Finally, the [Gospel] lost both wings as it fell towards the sea.

"Ha, haa, haa...!"

"Are you alright?"

On hearing Laura's rare panicked vice, Houki's erratic breathing started to calm down.

"I'm...alright. The [Gospel], it—"

Just when someone wanted to say 'We won', a ball of powerful light emerged from the sea surface.

"!"

As if time stopped, a ball-shaped space appeared in the midst of the sea surface. The [Silver Gospel] with the blue electricity covering it was hugging itself, squatting right in the middle.

"This...!? What's going on...?"

"DAMN IT! THIS IS—[SECOND SHIFT]!!"

As Laura shouted this, the [Gospel] turned to her as if responding to the voice.

As its face got covered by an inorganic mask, it was hard to see the expression. But from there, they could still feel the antagonistic intent, ringing a warning alarm in all the IS pilots.

However—it was too late.

"KYAAAAAAA...!!"

The Gospel let out what sounded like a wild beast's roar and charged at Laura.

"WHAT!?"

As it was too fast, Laura got her foot grabbed before she could even respond.

Then, like a butterfly emerging from its cocoon, the [Gospel]'s head-wings that were sliced off started to slowly regrow.

"LET GO OF LAURA!"

Charlotte quickly used [Rapid Switch] to attack using the close-ranged knife.

But the knife got blocked by the enemy, barehanded.

"MOVE AWAY! ESCAPE! THIS—"

Before she could finish, Laura got surrounded by those beautiful energy wings.

At that moment, the rain of energy bullets at 0 distance pierced into Laura, sending her falling to the sea.

"LAURA! DAMN IT...!"

Charlotte gave up on the knife attack and summoned the shotgun, aiming it at the [Gospel]'s face and squeezing the trigger.

*BAM--!*

But the sound didn't come from the shotgun.

The [Gospel]'s armor felt like an eggshell as cracks formed on the chest, waist and back, growing out little energy wings. The energy bullets fired from there knocked the shotgun and Charlotte away.

"WHA-WHAT'S THAT? THIS ABILITY...EVEN IF IT'S FOR MILITARY USE, IT'S TOO ABNORMAL—"

As Cecilia again tried to attack using the high mobility, the [Gospel] arrived in front of her. [Ignition Boost]—that was an acceleration that used both arms and legs to ignite an acceleration.

"WHAT?"

Once she closed in, the huge rifle wouldn't work. Even though she tried to pull the distance and raise the gun barrel, the rifle got kicked on the side.

The next moment, the [Gospel] began shooting from both wings on both sides, and before Cecilia could even come up with a decent counterattack, she began to fall to the sea.

"You dare—YOU DARE TO DO THIS TO MY TEAMMATES!!"

Using emergency acceleration, Houki closed in and continued to slash away, using parts of the [Fold-Out

Armor] to do special attacks, dodge the enemy's attack, and using the boosters to raise her unstable position and launch attacks.

""UOOOOHHH!!!"

This was a close-ranged fight with both sides dodging each other, and having increased her output slightly, the [Akatsubaki] finally managed to corner the [Gospel].

(Alright! If this keeps up--)

Houki stabbed [Karaware] out. However—

Kyuu...

"WHAT! I RAN OUT OF ENERGY!?—KUAA!!"

Using this opening, the [Gospel]'s right hand grabbed onto Houki's collar.

Its wings slowly covered Houki.

(Sorry, Ichika...!)

*Gya*, *gyan...*

Hearing the rustling of the waves, I stare at the girl patiently.

For some reason, her voice and dance made me nostalgic.

(...Ah?)

But once I recovered, the girl stopped singing.

She's no longer dancing, just staring up at the sky.

Feeling incredulous, I stood up from the log and walked towards the girl.

*Gya*, *gya*, *to*.

The cooling seawater accompanied the sound of the waves and lightly dampened my feet as I walked on the coast.

"What's wrong?"

Even though I asked that girl, she still looked up at the sky, not saying a single word.

As I look up at the sky where she's looking at as well, her voice suddenly reached my ears.

"It's calling me...I have to go."

"Huh?"

As I look around, the girl disappeared.

--Ah?

I look around, but there's no one around, and I can't hear the singing voice anymore.

*Gya gya*, *gya gya*. Only the sound of the waves could be heard.

"Um..."

Can't be helped. I could only turn around and return back to that wooden sofa.

Then—I hear an unknown voice from behind.

"Do you want power...?"

"Huh..."

I quickly turn around, only to see amidst the waves—a woman whose knees are under the sea.

Looking like a shining White Knight.

Her face was covered by a mask protecting the eyes, and I could only see her lower half.

"Do you want power...? For what..."

"Hm? Hm--...you just asked me something that's really hard for me to answer."

*Gya gyan*

Only the waves are between me and this woman.

"...Well, for my friends—no, to protect my friends."

"Friends..."

"For my friends. How should I put it? Aren't there things in this world that I have to fight for no matter what? Not just for struggling, but for lots of things."

Even though I haven't even arranged my thoughts properly, I could only talk with her just like that.

As I explained, I exclaimed 'Ah, so that's how I think' deep inside as I continued on.

"In this situation, well, there are a lot of things that don't follow logic, right? There's a lot of unreasonable violence. Because of this, I want to help my friends as much as I can, to help these people who're fighting with me in this world— my friends."

"I see..."

The woman answered silently and nodded her head.

"If that's the case, you have to go."

"?"

Another voice spoke up from behind me.

Turning around, I see the girl in white dress standing behind me.

Her face is showing an earnest smile, staring at me with an innocent expression.

"Look. Hm?"

She pulled my hand over and ran over to me, smiling.

I suddenly got embarrassed.

"Yes."

I nod my head.

A change suddenly happened.

"Wha-What!?"

--The sky, the entire world started to let out a really bright glow.

The scenery around me got swallowed by the white glow, moving further away from me.

'The dream has ended', that's what my mind thought.

(Ah, speaking of which...)

That woman looked like someone.

A female White Knight.

"Kuu, ugh...!"

Houki's throat got grabbed by the [Gospel], letting out a painful moan as her throat's being crushed.

The [Gospel]'s hand continued to grab onto Houki's neck, and the [Silver Bell] that evolved into energy mode covered [Akatsubaki] completely.

(Is this the end...it's embarrassing...)

The brightness of the wings of light increased. As the [Gospel] let out a countdown before firing, Houki only thought of something.

--I want to see him.

--I want to see Ichika.

--I want to see him immediately. I want to see him now.

--Ahh, ahh, I really want to see him.

"Ichi-ka..."

Unknowingly, she called out Ichika's name.

"Ichika..."

Facing the wings that were becoming even brighter, Houki got mentally prepared and closed her eyes.

*Iiiiin...!*

"!?"

The hand of the [Gospel] that was holding onto Houki suddenly let go.

As the puzzled Houki opened her eyes due to this sudden situation, she saw the [Gospel] get shot at by some powerful charged cannon bombarding.

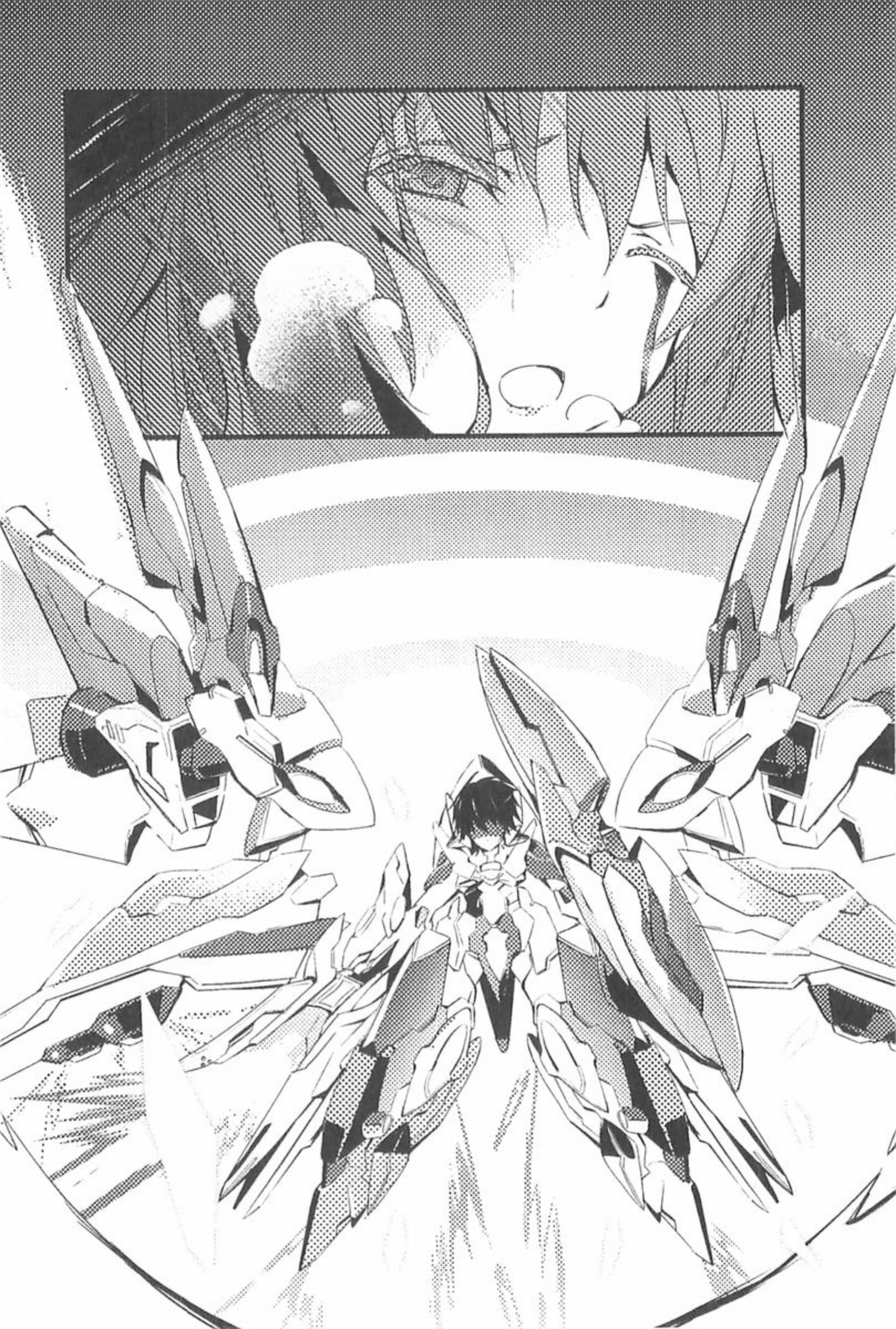
(Wha-What happened--)

Still in a state of disbelief, Houki heard a voice that broke her thoughts.

"DON'T YOU DARE TOUCH MY FRIENDS!"

A glowing white machine appeared in front of her.

"Ah...ahh, ahh..."



Houki's eyes started to tear up.

From her slightly teary eyes, she could see— Ichika in [Byakushiki]'s [Second Shift], [Setsura].

"Ichika, is that you, Ichika? Your body, your wounds...!"

I fly towards Houki, who's stuttering, and respond,

"Oh, I kept you waiting."

"That's great...that's really great...really..."

"What's up? Are you crying?"

"I-I'm not!"

Seeing Houki rub her eyes like that, I gently pat her head.

"Don't worry, it's alright."

"I'm-I'm not worried..."

Either way, it really is Houki's style to act tough. I pat her head. That hairstyle without the ponytail still made me mindful of it.

"That's good isn't it? Here."

"Huh...?"

I hand over what I brought along to Houki.

"A-A ribbon...?"

"Happy birthday!"

July 7, it's Houki's birthday today.

Because I didn't know what to buy, I could only ask Charl along.

"Well, since I bought it, just use it."

"Oh, okay..."

"I'm going to fight now— well, it's not over yet."

Saying that, I carry out an emergency acceleration at the [Gospel] that's flying over and clash with it head on.

"Let's battle!"

I brandish my [Yukihira Niigata] with just my right hand and slice towards it.

Facing the [Gospel] that gently evades, I use my new weapon [Setsura] to slash at it with my left hand.

This [Second Shift] equipment seems to change according to the situation and form different types as it seems to respond to my thoughts. An energy claw appears from my fingertips.

"DON'T YOU GET AWAY!"

The claw that extended to more than 1m long slashed the [Gospel]'s armor. Even though it got blocked by the energy shield, it still did hit the [Gospel].

"Enemy information renewed. Changing attacking level A."

The [Gospel] expanded its energy wings wide, showing the wings that appeared from its body, and countered with a sweeping attack after evading the last attack.

"WHO'S GOING TO LET YOU KEEP ATTACKING!!"

I didn't dodge as I readied my left hand first.

--[Setsura] changed into a shield and started defending
.

*KLANG!* With a sharp sound, the [Setsura] on the left hand started to change shape and expand, negating the rain of bullets from the [Gospel].

That's right. In other words, it's a shield with a [ One-Off Ability] like the [Reiraku Byakuya].

Even though [Setsura]'s rather draining, it can negate the enemy's attack, which gives me a huge advantage. I checked the specs already, [Gospel] doesn't have any live ammunition weapons.

"UOOOOHHHH!!!"

Armed with 4 large wing thrusters, [Byakushiki Setsura] can do [Double Ignition Boost]. Even the [Gospel ] that can do complex maneuvers can't dodge at my faster speed, so this should be enough to catch up to it.

"Change in situation. Using the most powerful attack."

As the mechanical voice declared this, the [Gospel] spread its wings to me, and quickly curled itself into a ball, forming a cage-cocoon state.

--Damn it, I have a bad feeling about that.

The worst case scenario did happen, as I expected.

The [Gospel]'s wings expanded out as it spun, and the energy bullets scatter all over the place like a storm. In other words, these attacks would hit Rin and the rest who haven't recovered yet.

(DAMN IT! HOW DO I PROTECT THEM--?)

As I immediately intended to become the shield of my friends, I heard a voice call out to me.

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING!? NO MATTER HOW BAD WE ARE, WE'RE STILL REPRESENTATIVE CANDIDATES! STOP WORRYING AND FINISH IT OFF !!"

"Rin...I got it."

Believe in my friends. This is the only thing I can do now, so no matter what, I will believe in them.

[Yukihira] in my right hand and [Setsura] in my left hand each create the light blade of the [Reiraku Byakuya] , and I flew towards the [Gospel] again.

(Ichika's here...!)

This made me really happy.

My heart started to race, burning as it continued to beat wildly.

Seeing Ichika's silhouette while battling, I felt an extremely strong wish inside me.

(I want to fight alongside him. I want to protect that silhouette!)

My heart started to pray strongly and earnestly.

As if responding to my wish, [Akatsubaki]'s [Fold-Out Armor] let out golden dust mixed with red light.

"This is...?"

From the Hyper Sensors, I could tell that my machine's recovering energy extremely fast.

--[Kenran Butou][3D 1] activated. [Fold-Out Armor] and [Energy Bypass]...complete.

The words written on it are [One-Off Ability]

(Can I still fight? If that's the case--)

I tie the ribbon Ichika bought for me and remotivate myself, keeping my eye on the [Gospel].

(Then, let's go! [Akatsubaki]!)

As if breaking through the sunset horizon, the crimson red machine that's glowing red and gold dashed forward .

"AHHHHHH!!"

The [Gospel]'s energy wings got sliced by the [Reiraku Byakuya]'s blade.

However, it was hard to slice off both wings. Besides, the 2nd strike got dodged. During this time, the [Gospel] regrew its lost wing and continued to launch a barrage of attacks at me.

"Ugh—"

--Energy left, 20%. Estimated time left: 3 minutes.

(Damn it! If this keeps up...)

I can't tell how much energy a military use IS that doesn't have a limiter has.

In contrast, my machine's almost at its limit. Thinking about this, I started to feel anxious.

"ICHIKA!"

"HOUKI? YOUR WOUNDS—"

"I'm alright! Don't talk, take this!"

Houki's—[Akatsubaki] touched my [Byakushiki].

An electrical-like surge and a burning sensation immediately passed through my body, and my vision started to waver for a bit.

"Wha-What...? My energy—recovered? Houki, this is—"

"Don't think about this now! Go on, Ichika!"

"O-Okay!"

Gathering my concentration, I let [Yukihira Niigata] increase the energy output to the maximum, and brandished the huge sword with both hands as I swung it around.

"OOOOOOH!!"

The [Gospel] spun once and dodged my horizontal slash. It then locked me within its vision, and the wings of light turned around—got it!

"HOUKI!"

"LEAVE IT TO ME!!"

The [Akatsubaki] used both swords to slice down on the [Gospel]'s wings that were aimed at me.

"DON'T YOU GET AWAY!"

She deployed the [Fold-Out Armor] on her feet, causing the [Gospel] to take a roundhouse kick with emergency acceleration.

Not expecting this initial hit, the [Gospel] lost its balance. I slashed off the remaining wings of light with an uppercut.

And just when I wanted to finish it off, the [Gospel] grew out all its wings on itself and fired at me.

(It's come down to this. No going back!)

While my body took the rain of bullets, I swung [ Reiraku Byakuya] at the [Gospel]'s body.

"OHHHHHHH!!!"

I felt the energy sword's contact as I increased the boosters output to the maximum.

Even when it's being held down, the [Gospel] continued to reach its hand for my neck. But before the fingers could touch it, this silver IS finally stopped moving.

"Haa, haa, haa...!"

Having lost her armor, the pilot in IS suit fell down to the sea.

"Damn it--!"

"—Really, your efforts went to waste, you."

Rin finally managed to recover from her injuries and saved the pilot before she reached the sea surface. Also, Charl and Laura seem to be alright, even though they aren't completely unscathed.

"It's over."

"Yeah...it's finally over."

Houki and I stood side by side as we looked at the sky.

The blue sky of just now was no longer present. Instead, the sunset gently covers the world.

"Mission completed—though I want to say that, you people acted on your own and broke the school rules. Once you get back, write a letter of remorse. I've already prepared a special schedule for your punishment, so you people better get ready."

"...Yes."

Welcoming back the warriors who came back, isn't that a little too cold?

Seeing Chifuyu-nee lecture us with both arms folded in front of her chest, it really made me feel like we didn't win at all. All of us were kneeling in the hall, and it's been 30 minutes already. Cecilia's face went from red to white, and that's a danger sign.

"We-Well, Orimura-sensei, that should be enough... be-besides, there are injured people, alright?"

"Humph..."

In contrast to the fuming Chifuyu-nee, Yamada-sensei was panicking. Up till now, she had brought a first-aid box and a bucket of water. She sure looked busy.

"Th-Then, everyone, please rest for a while before continuing with treatment. Remember to take off your clothes when we do a full body check on you—ah! Guys and girls are to be separated! Do you understand, Orimura-kun?"

...I do.

Speaking of which, the moment she said 'Take off', the girls subconsciously covered their own bodies, and that really hurt me. Do I look like a pervert who would peep on you...

"Then, everyone, please rehydrate yourself. It'll be a big problem if you don't rehydrate yourself in the summer."

Yes ma'am--as we echoed back in unison, I reached out for a sports drink. For health reasons, I chose a non-icy one. It's not good to gulp down an icy drink at one shot.

"OWWWW...UWAH! I cut my mouth!"

It's rare to have a metallic taste in my mouth. So this is the taste of blood. Maybe I was too excited in battle? I didn't even know that I bit my mouth. Anyway, I better not dip my dinner into wasabi and soy sauce, or I'll feel like I entered hell.

"..."

"Wha-What's wrong, Orimura-sensei?"

As she's been staring at me, I could only feel awkward and ask...uu, will I get scolded?

"...Speaking of which, you people did rather well. Luckily, all of you managed to return back safely."

"Huh? Ah..."

Chifuyu-nee seemed to look rather embarrassed. However, I couldn't tell what her expression was as she quickly turned away.

Seeing Chifuyu-nee who's still worried about us, I secretly thanked her inside my heart. I guess she would find it irritating if I were say it to her.

"..."

"..."

"..."

"..."

"..."

Hm? Why are the girls staring at me—or rather, glaring at me?

"Well...Orimura-kun? I'm going to start treatment on everyone, umm—"

"""""""HURRY UP AND GET OUT!!"""""""

As the five girls shouted out, I frantically escaped to the corridor.

I lean my back on the sliding door and closed it, exhaling deeply.

"Hooo..."

Anyway, this battle's over.

There's a lot of things I have to think of, to arrange. Anyway—

(I...protected my friends, didn't I?)

I—and [Byakushiki] did it.

"O, O, what's the result? Tell us~"

"...Nope, that's classified."

Sitting in front of me, Charl continued to eat in large gulps as she continued to be questioned by the 1st years. They probably feel that Charl's the easiest to talk to, right ? However, that's a misjudgment on their part. Charl's the one amongst the personal IS pilots with the strongest sense of responsibility. That's one thing I can be certain of .

"Che~ Charlotte's mouth is really tight."

"I say, you people will be forced to keep quiet after knowing it, you know. Is that alright with you?"

"Ahh...that's really troubling."

"So that'll be all. I won't say anything about this."

"Bu—"

As expected of Charl, she sure can handle girls of the same age easily. Yep, Charl's really suited to be a big sister.

"Wha-What's wrong?"

Suddenly noticing my stare, Charl asked.

Though it's nothing, for some reason, if I don't say anything, it seems that her mood would worsen...erm.

"Charlotte, your yukata is undone."

The girl besides her seemed to say something. Uu, I have a bad feeling about this. Recently, it seems that any bad premonition about girls would come true for me.

"HUUH...!"

As expected, Charl blushed and quickly covered her yukata with her hand...hm? What's with Charl-san's look of complete protest in her eyes?

"I-Ichika no ecchi..."[3D 2]

"Ah?"

WHY ARE YOU FRAMING ME! SPEAKING OF WHICH, WHY'S THAT? HUH? HUH, HUH?

"...I lied. The yukata wasn't open."

"!"

The girls beside her whispered something to her as well.

After hearing those words, Charl blushed as she stood up. Wha-What's wrong?

"..."

"Oh my, this sashimi's really delicious! Ahahaha, ufufu."

Charl's protesting eyes turned from me to the other girl, but the person involved didn't mind as she continued to gulp down her food.

"Charlotte's pretty ecchi."

"I'M-I'M NOT! I-I JUST...THAT...!"

This time, Charl's the one who looks in panic as she got teased by the girl beside her...um, I'm completely left out here.

"I-I-Ichika...? Erm, well, sorry about that...?"

"Hm? Okay."

I don't know what's going on, but I answered honestly. Well done, me.

After that, I heard a slam, and Charlotte sat down. She smiled and casually pinched the stomach of the girl beside her...uwa, seems like she's really angry.

--Oh well, let's just leave that aside for now. The problem right now's the girl beside me.

"..."

*Nibble nibble*, *chomp chomp*.

Having tied her hair into a ponytail again, Houki's chopsticks never stopped ever since the beginning.

For some reason, I feel that she doesn't want to talk to me, which is why she continued to eat...am I thinking too much?

"Well...Houki?"

*Chomp chomp*...stop.

"Well...is your body alright? You aren't hurt, are you?"

...Nods head.

After a second's pause, she nodded her head and started eating again. *Nibble nibble*, *chomp chomp*.

...

Hm.

"Ahem, Houki."

She got shocked.

After curling her body a bit, Houki put down her chopsticks and turned to me. She looked rather stiff for some reason, and even if it's not me, anyone could tell that something wasn't right with her.

"Is-Is-Is there something wrong...?"

"Nothing. It's just that you look weird, so I just wanted to ask what's going on."

"Is-Is it strange...for me to do that?"

*DONG!*

Ah damn it, I tripped without hiding it. Wh, why, why must she be so courteous...?

(Nonono, that's too weird! Ever since the battle ended, Houki's been so composed it's really weird, even the cat that's borrowed[3D 3] is more lively than her...)

But how should I put it. From everyone's reaction, I understood something. When 'Something is strange to you and you mention it, the girls will get angry for some reason'.

Hm, I really don't understand at all...but as this is a fact, I better not comment.

"Erm, well, never mind. It's nothing."

"Huh...ah, umm..."

Ugh, I suddenly felt that I said something wrong.

I can tell that Houki became even more listless as she continued to eat her food at half her speed...so, sorry...

"..."

"..."

After that, I didn't talk to Houki as I continued to eat my meal silently.

Really, this meal should be delicious, but I couldn't even remember the taste.

*Gya*...*gya*...

"Fuu..."

Standing on the coast, I knock my head slightly and turn my head both sides to clear the water in my ears. I then walk to a nearby rock to sit down.

After dinner, I had walked out of the resort to rest a little, and arrived at the seaside in the night.

As it's a full moon today, even at midnight, the moon's still extremely bright. I listen to the heavy sounds of the waves as I stare blankly at the bright sky with the moon in it.

(Speaking of which, I dreamt of something at evening, but...what kind of dream was it?)

I did remember it clearly when I woke up, but now, the dream feels fuzzy to me.

Though dreams are always like that, I feel that there's something important in the dream, something I just can't forget.

"I-Ichika...?"

With my name being called, I turned around.

Under the bright moonlight, it was Houki in a swimsuit.

"Houki...? Speaking of which, I didn't see you at the beach yesterday—"

"Do-Don't stare at me like that...I-I can't stay calm like this..."

"So-Sorry."

I frantically turn my body around.

Though it was a mere few seconds, I managed to see Houki in the swimsuit, and that image's fresh in my mind.

A white swimsuit—and a rare one at that. To put it in a way, that's a bikini that Houki definitely wouldn't wear .

Black straps alongside the swimsuit, revealing lots of skin—how should I put it. Well, sexy...yeah, it is sexy.

(No, no wait. This is too embarrassing...)

I try to hide my emotions that are unable to calm down , but it didn't seem to be working.

Besides, after noticing that Houki's sitting just 1 meter away from me, I couldn't calm down.

"..."

"..."

"Huh, that...yeah."

"Y-Yeah..."

I try to talk about some unrelated things, trying to ignore the heart that's beating non-stop for some reason.

But things aren't going as planned, as what I say is completely different from what I thought.

"Tha-That swimsuit, it suits you...yeah, that's good, isn't it?"

"Uu..."

I know that Houki backed away. I secretly took a glance, and her entire face was blushing.

"Th-Thi-This, well...I, I just thought of buying...but-but it really feels embarrassing to wear it...so..."

Maybe that's the reason why I didn't see Houki on the first day of free time.

And it seems that she's feeling awkward about looking over here and talk, so Houki and I continued to talk with our backs facing each other. The moon that's above us shines upon us.

"...Hey, Houki."

"Is-Is there anything...else?"

"No, why are you using such courteous words? Just talk as if it's normal."

"Uu..."

I've been mindful of that since dinner started, so I started asking her first. After a moment of silence, Houki seemed like she couldn't spit it out and stammered,

"You-You said that...you like dignified and elegant girls..."

--Uu, damn it. That's...

"No, well, I see. Houki, I think you just need to be yourself. You don't have to force yourself, right?"

"Uu...okay."

Though she looked rather unhappy, Houki coughed dryly a few times before moving her calm mode.

"Is-Is this good...?"

"Yup, the original Houki's good. Oh yeah, is your hair alright? I think it got slightly burned, right?"

"I-It's alright. I just lost my ribbon. It's nothing. And, well...I got a new ribbon anyway..."

"Oh, yeah. Let me say this to you again. 'Happy Birthday'."

"Uu, yeah...tha...thank...you..."

Though I couldn't hear the last bit of the voice, I know what she wanted to say.

And—hm, the ponytail goes well with Houki.

"That, well...I-I want to ask. Are you alright? Are-Are you hurt?"

"Hm? Oh, looks like I completely recovered!"

"Wha-What?"

"Well, the moment I opened my eyes, the IS activated. Before I noticed it, my wounds were healed completely."

"Do-Don't say such silly things! How is that possible—"

Saying that, Houki grabbed my shoulder and turned me over to look in the moonlight.

"It's gone...there are no wounds on you...?"

"Yup, I recovered. Huh, you see. Isn't there something? The IS pilot protective system."

"That's only used for protection, right? I've never heard that it could heal wounds..."

Timidly touching my back, Houki used her fingers to check if I had any wounds on me gain. While checking, I could hear her say 'That's strange'. Anyway, it just feels weird.

"Well, the wounds are healed well already anyway, aren't they?"

"Tha-That's not good! Because of me, you...Ichika, you got hurt..."

"What? Are you saying that it's better not to be treated ?"

"NO, THAT'S NOT IT!"

After saying that, Houki realized that she increased her volume.

"It's not like that...it's not like that...it'll bother me if I'm easily forgiven like that..."

She sounded really listless, so I start to wonder what she's thinking about.

Seems like she felt that she had to take responsibility for me getting injured, but since the wounds disappeared , she could be forgiven without being scolded, and this seemed to make her unable to accept it.

How should I say it? She's really hard to understand.

(But she seemed to have some goosebumps on her.)

Can't be helped then. I decided to give Houki a little punishment.

"Houki, I'm beginning with the punishment then."

"Uu, okay..."

I turn to Houki and look her straight in the face.

She closes her eyes, being all prepared now.

(Really, she...)

I flick a finger on her forehead.

"Erm...?"

"Alright, that's enough. If you got the message this time, don't be overconfident and act on your own next time."

"Wha-What?"

Houki looks troubled as she blinks her eyes. She then blushes and turns to me.

"Are-Are you making fun of me? Flicking my forehead with a finger...!"

"Okay, okay, calm down. Don't get excited."

"SHUT-SHUT UP! I'M A WARRIOR! MY PRIDE GOT STAINED. HOW DO YOU EXPECT ME TO CALM DOWN—"

"No, well...can you back away from me a little bit? Huh, they're touching me..."

Your breasts.

"!!!"

After realizing how close we were, Houki quickly pulled away from me.

After pulling her distance, she wrapped her arms around her chest, glaring at me with complete protest. Uwah...

"You, you...! I'm talking to you seriously, yet, you, you're so indecent!"

Yes, that's the case. I'm sorry that my mum gave birth to me as a boy.

"...Well, that...do-do you have any feelings...?"

"Haa?"

"It's-It's that!"

My hand suddenly got grabbed, and then—WHAT!? STRAIGHT IN HER BREASTS? HER CLEAVAGE!?... AHH, HOUKI...SAN?

"I-I just want to ask if you see me as one of the opposite gender..."

While Houki continued to maintain that fierce look, she suddenly lowered her volume, and even her ears were blushing. It seems that she's really shy.

"Y-eah..."

Even though I'm not forced by the situation, I still couldn't help but make the decision.

However, with the waves, hurriedly moving near and far, acting as the background music. With my childhood friend in front of me in a sexy swimsuit, and the clear moonlight shining down on us from the sky. It's because of this atmosphere that I'm moved, there's nothing to feel weird about.

And well...how should I put it. I...actually find Houki cute.

"Is-Is that so...uu, then..."

As if chewing on her words, Houki reflected on the meaning behind these words, and then digested them.

While being kept close, her body temperature spread to me.

Houki and I are so close I'm worried that I might hear her heartbeat.

"..."

*DOKI DOKI!* Even I feel that my heartbeat's way too loud.

Suddenly, Houki and I exchange looks.

(Ah...)

I'm completely mesmerized.

Her face really looks beautiful under the bright moonlight.

(Da-Damn it...well. Yeah, that's bad...right?)

Even though I'm thinking that it's bad, my heartbeat's getting even faster—

"CE-CECILIA!? WHY ARE YOU HERE!?'

"YOU TOO, RIN-SAN! COM-COMING OUT OF THE RESORT ON YOUR OWN LIKE THAT! I DON'T CARE IF YOU'RE SCOLDED."

"OKAY, ICHIKA'S..."

"HUH, LAURA, YOU...RIN AND CECILIA? WHY, WHY ARE YOU HERE...?"

ACK!!

Rig-Righ-Right now, these voices definitely belong to Rin, Cecilia, Laura and Charl.

From the audibility, they should be somewhere far away from us. But if I continue to remain here, I'll definitely be spotted by them.

And right now, there's only Houki and me here. I have no guarantees of what they would say after seeing me.

"Ho-Houki...let's go to the other side."

"Huh? Kya..."

Trying to escape from the voices that are getting closer, I pull Houki's hand and walk up the giant rock on the headland.

(Hoo...better hide here for a while. I think it should be alright if I head back to the resort later?"

"I-Ichika...that's too sudden. Well...bringing me to such an isolated place...I-I'll feel bothered..."

"U?"

As I have no idea what Houki's whispering, I turn my face to her.

"Nn..."

--Huh?

WHAAAAT!!? HO-HOUKI, SAN? WHY MUST YOU CLOSE YOUR EYES AND CURL YOUR LIPS!?

"..."

Houki's silent expectant face is definitely pretty.

--Uu, damn it...damn it, damn it...

(Damn it...I'll be sucked in like this...)

As I put my hand on her shoulder, Houki's body jerked.

Then, Houki leans her body over, and I slowly close in on her face—

*GOOSH!*

(...Hm? What's that?)

I again move my face close to hers—

*GOOSH!*

(That's irritating. What was that? Did something hit my head!?)

I thought as I opened my eyes—actually, it would have been better if I didn't.

Appearing right in front of me is a floating fin-shaped object, and there's also a rectangular opening.

"...[Blue Tears]..."

That's the BIT.

It pokes its cannon in my face.

*Kyuuiiii...*

"AHHHHHHHH!!!"

*BAM!*

That was close, I managed to dodge it. Well, my hair got burned.

"Hau..."

"—Very good, LET'S KILL HIM!!"

"ICHIKA, WHAT ARE YOU DOING...?"

"FUFU, FUFUFUFUFU."

The four needle-like stares are waiting for me as I turned around to dodge.

On a side note, the ones who spoke in order were Laura, Rin, Charl and Cecilia.

"HO-HOUKI! WE GOT TO RUN!"

"HUH? AHH? KYAHH!?"

Houki let out a scream as I carried her, but there's no time to bother about her.

Like an escaping rabbit, I run away from the four personal IS pilots.

(...AHHH)

WHY DO I FEEL THAT SOMETHING SIMILAR HAPPENED LAST MONTH!?

--Sounds of gunfire continued to chase me. STOP IT, I'LL DIE!! **I'LL REALLY DIE!!!**

"[Akatsubaki]'s operational rate including [Kenran Butou] is about 42%? Hm, that's about it?"

The female stared at the numerous values shown on the screens in the air as she gave an innocent smile.

Like a kid, like an angel.

The bright moonlight shines on that face that's no different from usual.

The person who often has a bored look, the person called Shinonono Tabane.

"Nn--...mn, nn."

As she continued to hum, she summoned another screen. It's [Byakushiki] as he's fighting in second phase.

Tabane's sitting on the fence at the headlands, shaking her feet and looking at that image.

In front of her, there's only the wide sea that's 30 meters in depth. But even though she may fall and hurt herself, her expression didn't change.

"Ha~[Byakushiki]'s really amazing. To think that it can allow the pilot to revive. Just like—"

"—Like the [White Knight], right? Core number 001 was the first frame in action, and the one you spent the most effort on, right?"

Chifuyu walked silently through the forest and came out. Covered in the black suit, her figure looked like she was about to take away the darkness in the night, as it's full of silence and majestic feel.

"Yaa, Chi-chan."

"Oh."

Both of them aren't looking at each other as they turn their backs on each other. Tabane continued to shake her feet like that, while Chifuyu leaned on the tree.

Even without looking, they can understand the expressions on each other's faces.

It's the trust between them.

"Oh yeah, Chi-chan, let me test you. Where did the [White Knight][3D 4] go?"

"...You'll get the answer by reading [Byakushiki] as [Shirokishi], right?"

"Bingo, as expected of Chi-chan, the one who piloted the [White Knight] before."

The frame that people called the [White Knight] was dissimilated, leaving the core behind. It had a huge contribution to the production of the first generation IS. However, its core disappeared after a certain research lab was raided, and then unknowingly, it was installed in the machine called [Byakushiki].

"And then...hoho. For example, someone exchanged messages through the Core Network, Chi-chan's first [White Knight] and her second frame [Kurezakura]. If that's the case, even if they develop the same [One-off Ability], there's nothing weird about it, right?"

"..."

Chifuyu didn't answer.

But Tabane didn't care about her answer and continued.

"Speaking of which, it was really unbelievable...that machine's core was set back to the default form when it was dissimilated. How did that happen? It should be set back to the default setting because I made it, right?"

"There're a lot of unbelievable things happening in this world."

Chifuyu doesn't understand.

And neither does Tabane.

But there's no problem.

"...Oh yeah, let me give an example."

"Huh, Chi-chan? That's rare of you."

"For example, a certain genius deliberately made a boy mistake his high school entrance exam location and put

the IS there such that it could only be activated at that time. If that's the case, the IS that shouldn't be operated by men becomes pilotable, right?"

"Hm~? But if that happens, he can't continue to pilot it, right?"

"That's right. You won't waste so much time to do such a thing anyway."

"Hehehe, because I'll get tired of it."

"...Then what's the truth? A certain genius?"

"Who knows? Fufufu, actually, I don't understand why [Byakushiki] activates. Logically speaking, Ii-kun and IS research are completely unrelated, right?"

"Humph...forget about it. Next hypothesis then."

"You really have a lot."

"Are you happy?"

Tabane answered 'That's right' and continued to listen to Chifuyu.

"A certain genius wanted to let her beloved imouto's[ 3D 5] IS grace the stage, so she prepared a personal IS and an IS going rampant."

Tabane didn't answer, and Chifuyu continued on.

"As the incident happened, the new model hi-capability machine could take part in battle. This genius' imouto could gracefully enter the stage as a personal IS pilot."

"Heh~ that's a really unbelievable assumption. It seems like such an amazing genius exists."

"Yup, such a genius exists. That genius once hacked 12 countries' military missiles to create a famous incident in history."

Tabane didn't answer, and Chifuyu didn't continue,

"Hey, Chi-chan, is the world you're living in interesting?"

"Ordinary, I guess."

"I see..."

The strong wind that blew up the headland let out a roar.

"---"

After saying a few words in that wind, Tabane disappeared.

Suddenly. She vanished.

"..."

Chifuyu sighed and leaned the back of her head on the tree branch.

The voice in her mouth disappeared together with the sea breeze.

## Epilogue: Your Name is...

The next morning, after we finished breakfast, we started packing the IS equipment.

Everyone was busy until past 10. Then, everyone began to board the buses, and lunch seem to be provided at a rest point on the way back.

"Yes ma'am~..."

Right now, as I sit down, I can only describe myself using the word 'Tired'.

I got chased for almost an hour, and the fact that I snuck out of the resort was found out. I got scolded by Chifuyu-nee, and in the end, I only slept for about 3 hours. I feel like I'm about to die carrying out such heavy activity.

"Sorry, anyone got a drink...?"

I asked because I was tired, but—

"...Drink your own saliva." That's what Laura said.

"I don't know." That's what Cecilia said.

"I have it, but I'm not sharing it with you." That's what Charl said.

Rin's from class 2, so she's not around here.

With my last ounce of hope, I turn to Houki.

"Wha-What are you looking here for?"

Just when I'm wondering if she's blushing, she suddenly karate chopped me. WA IT HURTS!!

"Uu, Humph..."

Seems like nobody wants to give me a drink. Is it because of my misconduct? Uu...

(Hm—he really looks pitiful...)

Though Charl's response was cold, she felt that her conscience was pricked on seeing Ichika that tired.

(Oh well. Besides, nothing happened last night. I should forgive him.)

Charlotte pulled out the tea from the PET bottle. She bought it before boarding the bus, and it seemed to be useful now.

(Everyone doesn't seem to be taking action yet. Good!)

(Was I too cold to him...?)

Seeing Ichika really dejected, Cecilia felt rather anxious .

It was a rare chance to be gentle to Ichika, yet she couldn't help but show that attitude because of what happened yesterday.

But thinking about it now, all the girls are unhappy with him. Now's a good chance!

(If that's the case--)

She reached for the PET bottle in her bag. She prepared it for herself, yet unexpectedly, it came to good use here.

(Time to seize the opportunity...fufu.)

(Why didn't I say it in another way...?)

Thinking about this was Laura, who took a new step on this beach expedition.

She's really remorseful that she was petty about what happened yesterday.

*In that situation, I should smile to him as a good woman!*

Laura thought as she wondered how to patch things up.

(Oh yeah, he looks really thirsty. Might the tea I bought this morning be useful?)

She played with the PET bottle she just took out, wondering how to give it to him.

It was rare for the other girls not to take action, and Laura felt that now was a good chance.

(Hm, I'll just sneak to him and pass the tea to him...if-if that's the case, I can remain with him all the way until the end of the trip.)

(Ahhh! I messed up...)

It's rare for the atmosphere to be as good as yesterday's, yet nothing happened in the end. Not only that, Houki's feeling unhappy that Ichika's been hiding from the other girls, so she responded like that accidentally.

(Thi-This is bad...do I have the habit of taking action subconsciously...?)

To be honest, this isn't good.

It was still okay up till last month, but right now, Charlotte's in the same class.

In front of that strong enemy, once she uses violence, he would push her ranking to the back.

(O-Okay! Time to show gentleness to Ichika!)

Houki holds the PET bottle tea that she bought before the bus ride, and stands up.

"Uu...I'm tired..."

""""""I-ICHIKA!!""""""

"Yes?"

Hearing the 4 girls call me at the same time, I turn around. At this moment, an unfamiliar girl walked into the bus.

"Excuse me, is Orimura Ichika-san here?"

"Ah, yes, that's me."

It just so happened that I was sitting at the front-most seat, and I immediately responded once my name got called.

That female's about 20+. She should be older than us alright. Her glamorous blond hair is shining all the more brightly under the summer sun.

As for attire, she's dressed in a cool-looking blue summer suit. However, it's not the professional kind Chifuyu-nee wears, but a casual trendy windbreaker. The open front cleavage allowed me to see a mature woman's ample breasts.

She hung the sunglasses on the shirt, right in front of the cleavage, and bent over to look at my face.

"So you look like this. Oh—"

The woman said that she stared at me in an interested manner. She's not sizing me up, but observing me out of curiosity.

The fragrant orange perfume on her reminds me that ' She's a woman', making me unable to remain calm.

"The-Then...you're...?"

"I'm Natasha Fairs, the pilot of the [Silver Gospel]."

"Huh—"

Just when I felt puzzled by this unexpected answer, I got kissed on the cheek!

"Oo...this is a present. Thank you, [White Knight]-san."

"Huh? Ah, uu...?"

"Then, that'll be my farewell—bye bye~"

"Oh, oh..."

Facing this Miss Natasha who waved at me and left, I could only watch her leave as I waved my hand blankly.

...Huh...

"..."

For some reason...for some reason...a bad premonition caused me to turn around.

"You cheating man."

"Ichika's rather popular."

"Sure looks like he's very lucky no matter where he goes."

"Hahaha."

The 4 of them closed in onto me. Ahh...I seem to hear the sound of army boots.

**"""""DRINK THIS!!!!"""""**

They threw 4 PET bottles of 500ml each at me. To be honest, these bottles can kill.

"..."

After getting off the bus, Natasha found the person she wanted to talk to, and walked over.

"Hey hey, stop spreading unnecessary sparks. It's troublesome to deal with those brats."

Chifuyu said that.

Natasha felt somewhat shy on hearing that.

"Because this guy's a lot better than I expected, so I accidentally..."

"Really...anyway, more importantly, is it really okay for you to walk around like that after 1 day?"

"Mn, it's not a problem. That kid saved me anyway."

The 'Kid' she mentioned about is the [Gospel] that went rampant in this situation.

"—So it was like that?"

"Mn, that kid entered that battle it didn't want to take part in to protect me. Forcing itself into second phase and cutting off the Core Network...that kid sacrificed her world for me."

Natasha continued on, and the carefree tone of hers is no longer present. Right now, she's giving off a vicious presence.

"So I won't forgive her! The one who took that kid's decision making ability! Making it as the enemy of all IS—I must find that person and make her pay!"

Even though the core wasn't damaged, because of the rampancy, the [Gospel] was ordered to be frozen at dawn this morning.

"...That kid loves flying more than anyone else, yet her wings got taken away...I won't forgive that person no matter who that person is."

"Don't do something foolish now. There's still the investigations, right? Anyway, watch patiently for now."

"Is this your advice to me? Brunhilde?"

Brunhilde—that's the title given to the winner of the IS [Mondo Grosso].

Chifuyu was the first winner, but to be honest, she didn't like others calling her that.

"Just a suggestion."

"I see. I'll just wait and see...for the time being."

The two who only met each other for the first time didn't talk any more as both of them went on their way.

The next time—these words are etched on their backs.

# Afterwords

The 3rd volume of IS was sold successfully.

But, well, I dragged on, and on, and on. I'm really sorry to the people involved and the readers. The reason why this happened was...my health wasn't good. Ever since summer started, I've been resting on the bed.

Right now, my body's gradually recovering, but once, I couldn't drink for four consecutive days. I thought I was about to die! However, I'm still alive now...anyway, I'm really sorry.

This time, I'll like to thank Okiura-san for providing the wonderful illustrations. It's really hard to draw the images corresponding to the pages, but Okiura-san drew them seriously for me, and I'm really grateful for that.

Huh, when writing the script, I would often get a mind block. It's not that I didn't have any motivation, but I ran out of battery. At this moment, I would read fulfilling things to recharge myself.

To me, the work with the most fulfillment was 'G Senjou Heaven's Door' by Nihonbashi Yoko-san. This book really helped me out a few times. Thank you. This work was my bible ever since I started small.

As for other works...recently, I've read Fujita Kazuhiro-san's 'The Black Museum: Springald'. I really like stories which involve flowers. Alright! Now I have to work hard alone!

Oh yeah, now for the Q&A. I once said that I would ' increase the role of the most popular person', so I did that in the 3rd volume.

That's right, it's Cecilia. But did she get too much time.. .? I'm reflecting on it.

Anyway, the questionnaire went onto the handphone network, so everyone can hand them in easily. The most popular character would get an increase in role (I'll be mindful of the balance with other characters).

But who's still the most popular character? I really can't tell. At the planning stage, I thought that it was Laura, but Charlotte got more parts written in, so I couldn't tell anymore. Recently, I've been focusing on

finishing up the character that would appear in volume 4 .

A few days ago, I took part in the MF Bunko J rookie award ceremony, and a lot of people said hello to me, making me few honored. Thank you, everyone.

That day, I discussed quite a bit, and learnt a lot. I'm considered a first-year in primary school amongst light novelists, and what many sempais said fascinated me. Today onwards, I want to maintain a friendly rival relationship with them and fight with them on the frontlines.

Once my body's alright, I want to go drink with them. And also, let's go for training camp (laughs) let's find an onsen resort, and everyone chit-chatting away...ah—I really want to organize one!

Then, as for the plot after this...anyway, the 4th volume will be about summer vacation, so it'll be a short break.

As for content, I will write an after-summer battle from the female protagonists viewpoint that would make

everyone's heart beat wildly. That's the kind of feeling. There won't be any fighting. But...the battle of love still reigns supreme?

That's strange? There's still a lot of pages. Well...ah, let's talk about the tragedies recently.

"My wife played with my 'Bayonetta'."

"My wife went to assemble the MG Exia Gundam ( Ignition Mode)."

...Huh? They aren't that bad, right? Hm...

More than that, I have to assemble the Gundam models I bought first. I didn't even use the airbrush I bought in the summer. I really want to use it.

Ahh, speaking of which, I bought a tablet PC, so I can write my script whenever I go. It's really useful. The start-up time's really fast, and the price is cheap, so I recommend it to everyone.

Finally, I'll like to thank the readers for their support.

Then, we'll meet each other in the 4th volume afterwords. Goodbye.

--Yumizuru Izuru

A certain day in November, 2009.

Congratulations to Yumizuru-san for producing the 3rd volume.

And also, I'll like to thank the readers who bought this book.

This time, as Laura's a lot cuter than I imagined.

It left a deep impression on me, so I'll present everyone this picture.

To the readers who read afterwords 1 and 2,

I'm really sorry to you for thinking that the illustration will be about Rin this time...

I placed a meaningless unwritten rule as a motto.

Should this be called a manner of living without caring about the specifics, or an R&B about me?

Yazawa Eikichi-san's like the blue light...as it's too cold , I'll just end it here...

# □あとがき

弓弦先生3巻発売おめでとうございます！
そして、お手にとってくださった読者の方々
ありがとうございます。

今回は想像以上のラウラの可愛さが
印象的だったので、このシーンをw

1,2の流れでここも鈴だと思った方スミマセン…
当方、無意味な不文律をモットーとしており
型にはまらない生き方っつーか、それがミーのロック魂っつーか
ヤザワはブルーレイみたいな…寒いのでこの辺でやめます…
ただ、描きたかっただけなんで

# Translation Notes and References

## Chapter 1

1. ↑ This is a parody of 君, Kimi ga Aruji de Shitsuji ga Ore de, You are the Master and the Servant is Me, also known as They Are My Noble Masters.
2. ↑ Tabi refers to the traditional Japanese socks
3. ↑ Zori refers to the straw sandals
4. ↑ Piper here refers to Pied Piper of Hamelin.
5. ↑ 嫁(yome nisuro)
6. ↑ In ancient Japanese, 'before breakfast' would mean doing easy things that can be done without breakfast, since the idea is that people will be weak when they don't eat breakfast.
7. ↑ Game console B button
8. ↑ Frying someone in oil
9. ↑ **S**tudent **H**ome-**R**oom
10. ↑ In Katakana:　-
11. ↑ Red Rice or Sekihan is a traditional japanese dish especially made on special occasions for celebration.

## Chapter 2

1. ↑ の. A rought translation for it will be 'whatever/ anyhow'.

2. ↑ Shoji doors are the traditional japanese wood and paper made doors
3. ↑ This is a reference to the time when Laura beat up Cecilia and Rin in order to provoke Ichika into fighting her until Chifuyu jumped in the middle and stopped them with an IS sword, without the aid of an IS itself.
4. ↑ Sashimi is a Japanese dish made of raw meat ( mostly fish) sliced into thin pieces.
5. ↑ Seiza is the proper manner of sitting in Japan
6. ↑ This is hard to explain. There's no English wikipedia, so I found it on Japanese. Anyway, the scientific name for this fish is Stephanolepis cirrhifer , and it's said to be a pretty pricey fish. Link
7. ↑ Wasabi, also known as japanese horseradish, is a food ingredient known for it's spiciness.
8. ↑ "I-I'm allright..."
9. ↑ Yamato Nadeshiko is the term used for an ideal Japanese woman
10. ↑ Based on L'Oreal, I'd say

**Chapter 3**

1. ↑ Can be translated as: "Voila!" or more likely: "Ta Da!"
2. ↑ 紅, "Red Camellia"

3. ↑ 雨, "Rainy Moon"
4. ↑ 空, "Cracked Sky"

**Chapter 4**

1. ↑ 絢, "Magnificent Dance"
2. ↑ This is a term that Charl uses whenever she feels Ichika did something perverted. It roughly translates to "Ichika's a pervert" or "Ichika you pervert" just in a more mellowed sense.
3. ↑ 借, "karate kita neko"; ie: a cat in an unfamiliar place would be extremely quiet
4. ↑ 白, "Shirokishi"
5. ↑ "Imouto" is Japanese for "Little Sister"